

FROM OLD SCHOOL TO HIGH SCHOOL: ARTS ORGANIZATIONS
AND THE TEENAGE AUDIENCE

By

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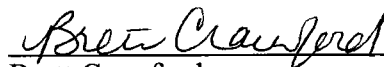
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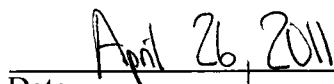
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DEDICATION

To my husband and family for all of their love and support
and to all of my teachers and professors who have encouraged my passion for the arts.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the current relationship between performing arts organizations and the teenage audience, defined as individuals between the ages of 13 and 18. Special attention was given to this demographic and their interactions and reactions to arts education, programming choices, marketing, and the use of new technologies. Six arts managers from leading arts organizations in the greater Washington, D.C. area and two professors of education from American University were interviewed. They provided insight into the current trends and problems that arts organizations are facing when trying to reach out to this younger generation. Most current outreach is through arts education programs because many organizations do not find it financially beneficial to market to teens. This research has shown that arts organizations need to give special attention to how they can make their venues more inviting to teens and how they use technology to communicate with this generation, in hopes of turning them into lifelong supporters of the arts.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
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Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION	1
Background of the Problem	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Purpose of Study	2
Research Questions.....	4
Importance of the Study.....	5
Scope of the Study	6
Definition of Terms.....	6
Delimitations and Limitations.....	6
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	9
3. RESEARCH METHODS	19
The Qualitative Paradigm	19
Qualitative Methods.....	19
The Researcher's Role	19
Data Sources	20
Data Analysis	21

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS	22
Technology and Communication.....	22
Barriers that Could Keep Teenagers from Arts Organizations.....	24
Factors that Foster Teenage Engagement	37
5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION	43
Recommendations.....	43
Overcoming Barriers that Could Keep Teenagers from Arts Organizations ..	45
Factors that Foster Teenage Engagement	55
Suggestions for Future Research	60
Conclusions.....	62
APPENDIX.....	63
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	65

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Arts organizations are always trying to improve so that they can better achieve their missions while maintaining financial stability. Throughout the years this has led organizations to put more effort towards analyzing their audiences and what approaches have been effective in getting that audience into the theater, into the concert hall, and at the performance. By using methods of assessment, including ticketing programs and other methods that track performance attendance, performing arts organizations have made progress in understanding who are filling their seats each week. By having a better idea of who attends their performances, arts organizations can then learn how to grow their audiences, specifically through marketing to other demographic groups or attracting more people who fit the mold for their current audience.

Studies have been done focusing on mature audiences, college-aged audiences, and ethnically diverse audiences. Research has also been conducted on children and their relationship with the arts, with a special focus placed on arts education. These studies have proved themselves to be effective tools for arts organizations. However, with these studies and many more completed on audience groups, little attention has been given to the teenage age group of individuals aged 13 to 18 years old, despite the fact that over 25-percent of the United States' population is under the age of 18 and this specific age group

makes up over eight percent of the American population.¹ Arts organizations have not considered how their relationships with this demographic could affect their future success.

Statement of the Problem

With so many other studies on audience members and ways to build audiences of certain demographics, it is curious that little focus has been given to this in-between age range of 13-18 years old. Because this age group does not have as large an amount of income as adults, some arts organizations do not believe it is profitable for them to reach out to it. Others indicate that there is no real correlation between having arts experiences in high school with becoming life-long arts participants and supporters, although many people do see this age as a formative time that shapes a person's identity. In my research, I analyze this age group, their current relationship with the performing arts in the greater Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, and ways that organizations are currently cultivating this age group. I make suggestions as to how arts organizations could proceed in the future.

Purpose of Study

This thesis explores the relationship between young adults and arts organizations in the hopes of finding ways that arts organizations can better develop and cultivate this

1. U.S. Census Bureau, *Age and Sex in the United States: 2008*, http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/age/age_sex_2008.html (accessed April 18, 2011).

demographic. It also serves to demonstrate to arts organizations why they should develop this age group. The analysis considers arts organizations that have a performing arts focus. The target population is high school-age students, who typically range in age from 13 to 18. While there continues to be new research on how to best develop college-age audiences, high school-age audiences continue to be under-researched, despite the fact that high school years are a formative time in building relationships with the arts. Any research that has been conducted on this demographic tends to focus more exclusively on arts education and more research has been done on students in grades 10 through 12 than students in grades six to nine. This research assesses the current studies regarding audience development that have been completed on college-age audiences and uses this research to develop a framework for the analysis of high school-age youth and their relationship with the arts. Primary research was conducted on high school-age audiences by meeting with educators who know this demographic best, as well as speaking with arts managers whose organizations are reaching out to young adults.

The aim of this paper is to develop new and effective ways that arts organizations can reach out to and cultivate these teenagers. In the arts management field, this research would be extremely helpful from development, marketing, and even programming perspectives. Arts organizations are always looking to build their audiences. While focus has been placed on white, ethnically-diverse, female, male, and young school children audiences, little focus has been given to teenagers in terms of audience development. This research could make arts organizations change and enhance their

marketing since they are reaching out to a new demographic, more carefully consider their programming so that some of their productions appeal to the interests of this younger generation, and help them as they build relationships with these individuals who someday will be full-grown adults with disposable incomes that they could be willing to share with an arts organization that reached out to them in their youth.

This thesis research involved reading and analyzing articles and studies on the topic, interviewing education experts, and talking to Washington, D.C. area arts organizations about their current outreach to young adults. Each of these steps contributes to painting a comprehensive picture of the relationship between arts organizations and young adults today. They will also help determine what future trends arts organizations face with this demographic and what actions should be taken in order to prepare to address youth needs within the arts.

The world continues to shift with each generation, as each generation shows certain preferences toward communication methods, content, and overall interests. By analyzing the information that exists about audience development in college settings, this study presents insights about how to reach people at younger ages and how to potentially build a life-long relationship with them in the arts. This research and outreach to a younger generation are essential to ensure the continued funding and support for the arts, as well as spreading the enriching values of the arts to a new generation.

Research Questions

Some research questions that are particularly relevant to this study include:

- Do performing arts organizations reach out to youth?

- Many arts organizations claim that they do not reach out to youth because this demographic does not have the money to spend on tickets, etc. Is this a valid argument?
- Are there reasons, beyond current purchasing power, that suggest it is important for arts organizations to reach out to youth?
- What methods and strategies can arts organizations use to engage youth?

Importance of the Study

This study is important because it could change the way that arts organizations plan their programming, marketing, and other basic business functions. If it proves beneficial in the long-run to create more programs for teenagers, more organizations might want to reach out to this group. This teenage audience could also potentially create more financial stability in the arts world. By having more audience members, arts organizations would have the liberty to put on different types of performances that allow them to better fulfill their missions because there would be less stress on needing to make money. More audience members would create a more stable financial situation for these organizations.

This research is also important because the study of this demographic is unique. In the arts world, successful ways that performing arts organizations can interact with the 13-18 year-old age group have not been identified. This study also critically considers the implications of social media and how arts organizations might need to adapt to keep up with an ever-changing culture. Overall, this research is significant because it explores

areas that have not been comprehensively researched before and begins to answer questions about this under-researched age group and their arts tendencies.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on performing arts organizations within the greater Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, including Virginia and Maryland. It looks at both educational programs and traditional theaters/concert halls and how these arts organizations currently relate to this age group. It also highlights successful programs that are currently in place and suggests guidelines for how other arts organizations could successfully cultivate this demographic.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, *performing arts organization* refers to an organization whose primary focus is on theater, dance, music, and creative writing, as opposed to a focus on the visual arts, such as paintings, sculptures, and the like.

Youth, teenagers, or adolescents will be defined as individuals between the ages of 13 and 18 years old. Since, in general, this age range is in their high school years, *high school aged* or *high schoolers* may be used synonymously for this age range.

Delimitations and Limitations

This research has been limited in scope for a number of reasons. The main reason is the legal steps necessary to speak with adolescents under the age of 18. People in this age group are considered minors. In order to speak with individuals who are 17 or younger, permission from his or her legal guardian would have to be secured. This would require arranging a meeting with both parent and student, or sending a consent

form home to the legal guardian to be signed before meeting with the minor in question. Because of this limitation, the focus of the study shifted to understanding arts organizations and their relationships with teenagers and how teenagers learn about the arts. To accomplish this goal, meetings were held with arts managers who work for arts organizations that have teen programs, as well as with education experts who can describe how this age group processes and relates to stimuli, specifically those related to the arts.

Another limitation has been geographic constraints. The research focuses on the greater Washington, D.C. area, including Maryland and Virginia. This is because this area is so rich in arts organizations that it affords the opportunity to learn about numerous arts perspectives in one location. Organizations were chosen because of their reputation for working with teenagers and for their reputation for success in performances. Along with a wide range in arts organizations, there is a wide range of backgrounds and economic levels between D.C., Virginia, and Maryland. This led to a deeper understanding of teenagers who have different home lives and upbringings.

Time has been another limiting factor in this research. There are an endless number of ways to approach this topic. This research attempts to look at a few pieces of this topic. Had more time been available, the author would have interviewed more extensively and explored some issues in greater depth. Research on this topic should continue long after this paper.

While this research touches on some of the programs available for at-risk or special needs teens, it does not go into this topic in depth. This area could be researched completely on its own. For the purposes of this paper, a broad overview of programming

for teens was considered. Although some at-risk and special needs programs were included in this analysis, it certainly does not accurately represent the number of arts programs available for these special groups.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

From drawings on cave walls to using body language to communicate before spoken language was created, human beings have been active participants in the arts and have built communities and civilization as a whole with the arts at their center. Every generation brings a slightly different perspective on the world, with shifting preferences toward communication methods and interests that shape popular culture. In order for arts organizations to carry on in their role as bringing together peoples and creating community, arts organizations need to learn how to reach out to the adolescents of today. Aged between 13 and 18 years old, today's high school students are becoming the leaders of the next generation. It is important that arts organizations develop a better understanding of what this new millennial generation needs and how the arts can fit into their lifestyles.

While not much research has been completed on high school-age students, research that has been completed on college-age students, who are only a few years older, can provide valuable information into the thinking process and preferences of this younger demographic. Looking at this research is not only valuable in assessing the current trends between teenagers and arts organizations, but it also gives insight into the future relationships this generation will have with the arts as they continue to age.

The way that arts organizations view their relationship with audiences continues to change. What they originally viewed as a transaction is now being looked on with “a relationship focus with the aim of long-term audience retention.”² Since the arts focus on engagement with their patrons, the audience member becomes central to the arts experience.³ Although the audience member continues to be a primary focus of most arts organizations, this focus is limited by the typical audience member that the organization has. Since arts organizations still must function to some extent as a business, they need to also focus on which audience members are valuable factors in their earned income. Because of this placement of priority, many teens are left out of the equation, simply because they are not the primary source of income nor do they make up the majority of most current audiences.

That being said, some arts organizations have realized the implications of having a graying audience and have taken strides to reach out to young adults. Many organizations have diversified programming, created new marketing and ticketing concepts, and have developed educational programs in hopes of developing future generations of audiences.⁴ Through these steps, one of the new audiences that arts organizations focus on are the 20- and 30-year old segment. Many effective programs for

2. Rentschler, Ruth, Jennifer Radbourne, Rodney Carr, and John Rickard, “Relationship marketing, audience retention and performing arts organisation viability,” *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, Vol. 7 No. 2, Feb. 2001, 123.

3. Ibid., 124.

4. Reiss, Alvin, “Arts Program Aims at Audience of Tomorrow – Today,” *Fund Raising Management*, Vol. 27, No. 7, Sep 1996, 36.

this demographic include discounted membership programs, discounted tickets to performances, and special events designed specifically for this age group.

Meanwhile, some organizations are trying to reach directly out to high schoolers. One such exemplary program takes place in New York City. In 1995 the program High 5 Tickets to the Arts was developed to offer New York City high school students easy to obtain, discounted tickets to a wide range of cultural events.⁵ This program has seen positive results within this pre-college student audience. Still operating, the organization is “dedicated to making the arts affordable for teens,” only charging \$5 per ticket for individuals between the age of 13 to 18.⁶ By showing a school ID and paying \$5, teenage students can choose to attend any of dozens of events, ranging from theatrical productions to ballet performances and music concerts. In its founding years, this organization found important funding from foundations and corporations. This funding has allowed the organization to carry on to the present while giving many students their first experiences with arts events. The organization has also now expanded to include teenagers from any state and from around the world.⁷ This small program that was created just for teens in New York City is having major impacts on teenagers and the arts on a much larger scale.

5. Reiss, Alvin, “Arts Program Aims at Audience of Tomorrow – Today,” *Fund Raising Management*, Vol. 27, No. 7, Sep 1996, 37.

6. High 5 Tickets to the Arts, <http://www.high5tix.org/>, Accessed 17 November 2010.

7. Ibid.

As effective as the High 5 program might be for teenagers, there are few programs similar to it across the country for this younger demographic. However, programs continue to develop for college-age students and young adults in their 20s and 30s. Since educational level is “generally considered to be one of the most important factors positively influencing attendance at arts events,”⁸ many arts organizations regard college students as a consumer segment that is most likely to become regular supporters of the arts. Studies on this demographic in Slovakia revealed that in Bratislava 54% of attendees at ballet and opera performances were university students.⁹ This was compared to the only 14.5 percent of high school graduates who attended.¹⁰ It is important for arts organizations to understand the attitudes and motivations of university students in order to market most successfully to this demographic. The arts should also appeal to this educated side, using the arts to stimulate deeper learning and meaning.

Other researchers have looked into how political beliefs in college students affect arts attendance, particularly when students self-identify as holding certain political beliefs. Studies have found that political beliefs do impact the purchase of tickets for different genres within the arts, with only ballet and other dance forms having no

8. Tajtakova, Marie and Daniel Arias-Arand, “Targeting university students in audience development strategies for opera and ballet,” *The Service Industries Journal*, Vol. 28 No. 2. March 2008, 180.

9. Ibid., 180.

10. Ibid., 180.

differences associated to tendency to buy tickets.¹¹ People with more conservative views tended to favor Broadway shows while people with more liberal views bought tickets to shows for jazz music, student performances, and others.¹² However, the researcher notes that “no single artform naturally excludes a particular audience,”¹³ highlighting the important point that the arts are always meant to be inclusive, but individuals’ personal views can shape their preferences towards different arts forms. This study is particularly relevant to my research on high school students because it speaks to the fact that each individual’s viewpoint shapes the way that he or she perceives and interacts with the arts.

When dealing with high school students, it might also be important to consider the viewpoints of the role models around them. If their parents, teachers, and other adults in roles of authority are demonstrating to them that the arts do not have value in today’s society, then it is unlikely that these teenagers will develop different views towards the arts and become arts participants and supporters. This background information and the different ways that it affects high school populations should be considered when drawing conclusions about how to better develop the role that arts organizations play in young people’s lives.

Arts organizations need to consider their product, pricing, placement, promotion, and people when trying to successfully build a relationship with any audience. In terms

11. Varela, Ximena, “How Beliefs Matter: Views, Motives and their Relation to Buyer and Donor Behavior,” *Wolf Brown Value & Impact Study: Supplementary Research* (San Francisco: WolfBrown, 2007), 22.

12. Ibid., 23.

13. Ibid., 24.

of product, few arts organizations shape their programming for a teenage demographic. Marketing planning “must begin with the consumer, not with the organization,”¹⁴ and yet most arts organizations do not consider what the high school-age group finds attractive. As a result, some would argue that arts organizations are not building a relationship with this demographic because they are trying to cater to their traditional, older audiences instead. However, arts organizations need to be wary of relying on these audiences, as they will not be around forever. Arts organizations need to find ways to make their product appealing and to create an appealing product for a younger generation.

Pricing is another aspect of the arts that continues to be a challenge. With the recent economic problems, arts organizations are walking a fine line between charging enough for tickets to keep their organizations open and keeping ticket sales low enough to keep their organization accessible to the public. In 1997, some estimates stated that the performing arts industry as a whole was attempting to function at a level 30 to 50 percent beyond the capacity of its available resources, a proportion that has not improved with time.¹⁵ In 1971, the cost to attend an orchestra performance was approximately \$5 at the industry’s 13,000 performances. By 1981 it was \$12.62 per person at 20,100 performances. By 1991, the costs had risen to an average of \$26.17 at the industry’s

14. Kotler, Philip and Joanne Scheff, *Standing Room Only: Strategies for Marketing the Performing Arts* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1997), 34.

15. Ibid., 10.

18,100 performances.¹⁶ This cost covers only approximately 39 percent of the services provided.¹⁷

With the United States financial crisis of 2008, arts organizations have struggled to find ways to solve their budget deficits. In hopes of lessening financial woes, many arts organizations have raised the price of their tickets. Some organizations found this approach helpful, but others saw dwindling audiences when people could not pay the steeper ticket price. This forced some arts organizations to shut down. Other organizations that did not raise that ticket prices were also forced to close due to other factors.

Even with the arts organizations that have survived, one has to question how the economic crisis has affected their ability to carry out their missions. With climbing ticket prices, people may be less likely to attend performances because of financial barriers. This could present arts organizations with new challenges as they attempt share their particular approach to the arts with as many people as possible, but while also making enough money to stay afloat. At this time more than ever, arts organizations are looking to generous donors and other sources for the financial income that they need. This includes adding to their earned income with restaurants, shops, gift stores, etc.¹⁸

16. Kotler, Philip and Joanne Scheff, *Standing Room Only: Strategies for Marketing the Performing Arts* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1997), 11.

17. Ibid., 11.

18. Ibid., 12.

Another aspect of marketing that arts organizations should consider is the placement of their programming. Since a product or organization “can evoke many associations, which combine to form a total impression, the positioning decision involves selecting which associations to build upon and emphasize and which to remove or deemphasize.”¹⁹ An organization needs to have a clear plan on placement, so that its marketing strategies can be aligned and, therefore, be successful.

There are many factors that can help an organization decide its placement strategy. Some attributes inside the organization that it can use to plan its placement strategy include: the director’s charisma, the programming focus, the organization’s reputation, the performance hall, or perhaps a star performer or composer.²⁰ There are also sets of attributes that an organization can base its placement strategy on, including using multiple attributes to create one strong statement that can be used in a season brochure or to advertise a particular performance.²¹ Using this approach allows arts organizations to appeal to a wider audience with a single strong, strategic message.

Once a placement strategy is in effect, an arts organization needs to consider how to carry it out, or the promotion of that product. This may involve news conferences, press releases, inside access to performances, having staff or performers speak in the community, and reaching out to local community members to form connections with

19. Kotler, Philip and Joanne Scheff, *Standing Room Only: Strategies for Marketing the Performing Arts* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1997), 205-206.

20. Ibid., 206.

21. Ibid., 206.

community organizations. Some arts organizations use social media and technology to promote their performances and events. This includes having an updated Facebook page where people can find out about the latest developments, a Twitter page where people can share ideas and read postings, and a blog where individuals can read about the inside scoop at the organization. In some cases, arts organizations use email and cell phones to reach out to audiences. Email blasts, e-newsletters, videos, and text reminders can keep people interested and engaged with an organization on a daily basis, without the arts organization expending extra effort.

Finally, the most important aspect that an arts organization needs to consider when trying to build a successful relationship with an audience is the people themselves. An organization needs to have a clear idea to whom they are reaching out. It is important that they analyze their current audience and note any trends that seem to define this group. Once they have properly analyzed their current audience, they can go about trying to add to that audience by using the information that they have learned. By knowing what people like or do not like about the organization, proper steps can be taken to improve audience members' overall experience. Information about the current demographics of the audience can also provide valuable insight into what needs to be done to bring in more people from varied backgrounds.

Arts organizations should also take the time to carefully consider the groups with which they want to increase engagement. What groups should they be reaching out to but are not? Are there any local groups that they are overlooking? Are there any local partnerships that could be made to better the organization and the surrounding

community? Once they have identified these groups and again considered the defining characteristics that set these groups apart, they can more successfully develop their plan to reach out to them.

This approach would be particularly effective for organizations that seek to grow audiences among youth. By carefully studying the ways in which teenagers communicate, schedule their time, and respond to marketing, an arts organization could cultivate this demographic into regular arts patrons and participants. However, for many arts managers the question is: is it worth it? Is it worth spending time, energy, and manpower to reach out to a demographic that is made up of individuals who are not the primary income-winners in their households? Many teenagers have access to and spend more money than most people think. However, for many arts organizations this is a serious matter which needs to be more carefully considered.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

The Qualitative Paradigm

This research is qualitative in nature because of the multiple contexts from which the research question is analyzed. The questions were shaped and changed to be relevant for each arts organization. The author sought to more deeply understand the topic while observing arts organizations in their natural settings. This research has been process-oriented, focusing on valuable meetings and interviews with arts and education experts.

Qualitative Methods

In this research, new data was gathered through informational interviews with education experts and arts managers from arts organizations in the greater Washington, D.C. area. These interviews took place in-person and over the phone. In many cases, the author also received tours of arts organizations' educational and general facilities.

The Researcher's Role

Information was gathered from both individuals and written sources and have analyzed these sources to find connections, as well as to identify what elements seem to contribute most significantly to success in programs for teen audiences. Special attention was given to gaining a better understanding of any possible connection between arts participation in high school and being an arts supporter later in life.

Data Sources

Data sources include published articles and books, online sources, and information acquired through interviews. These sources cover topics including marketing strategies, engagement with different demographics, development strategies, and the use of social media and technology.

The interviews included arts managers working for performing arts organizations in the greater Washington, D.C. area, including Arena Stage, Columbia Center for the Theatrical Arts, DC Youth Orchestra, Imagination Stage, and the Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts. These organizations represented a range of music, theater, spoken word, and movement activities. Located in Washington, D.C., Virginia, and Maryland, these organizations also work with teenagers and people from varying economic backgrounds. During the meetings, subjects were asked about the outreach that they do to the teenage demographic, what technologies their organization uses, why their organization thinks it is or is not important to reach out to teenagers, and other questions addressing each organization's current relationship with its audience members. (See Appendix A for full list of questions.)

The author also spoke with education professors at American University to gain a deeper understanding of how teenage audiences learn and process the arts. These interviews included discussions on how teenagers process and retain information, develop sense of self, and deal with the social pressures that they face in high school. The conversations also explored how the brain develops and if connections exist between brain development in early arts education and support for the arts as an adult. Was high school a formative time in people's lives, when children begin to recognize and relate to

the arts, how high school experiences have an impact on individuals later in life, how the internet and social media have changed high school students' expectations for learning in the classroom, and other questions? (See Appendix A for full list of questions.)

These different data sources provide insight into the current relationship that teenagers have with the arts, as well as the relationships held by both children and college-aged audiences. Information about these other demographics supplied valuable information that could be used to create a framework of expectations when working with teenagers. Published articles and books explained current trends and studies into marketing, programming, and other aspects of the arts. Online sources shared information about technology and the current practices of arts organizations.

Data Analysis

Information from interviews has been analyzed for universal themes, larger ideas, challenges, and successful approaches. Extensive notes were created during each interview and this information was analyzed on both an individual basis and alongside information from other arts organizations. A profile of each arts organization was created from the interview notes and highlighted specific successes the organization had or particular areas of weakness that the organization desired to improve. This allowed the identification of areas of universal concern between arts organizations as well as successful strategies at certain organizations. This analysis also indicated the ways in which the organizations compared to each other, while considering their geographic locations and the economic backgrounds of their audience members.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This research led to the discovery of several themes within the findings. The issues that were discussed most often were technology and the communication methods used to reach out to teenagers. These are important factors that arts organizations have to address when reaching out to both the teenage audiences and their regular audiences. This research advanced the discussion on emerging uses for technology and the successes that organizations have had in their audience development when using specific communication methods.

Technology and Communication

One of the ways that arts organizations are beginning to connect with teenagers is through social media and other technology that this demographic uses on a daily basis. As one arts manager put it, it is important to “intersect with teenagers where they are in their world.”²² Thus, technology can serve to put teenagers at ease and allow arts organizations to develop a deeper relationship with this demographic.

Since teenagers are used to being entertained constantly by changing media, it is important for an arts organization to maintain its relationship and communications with

22. Brett Crawford, Imagination Stage, in-person interview with author, January 31, 2011.

this demographic. Facebook changes, Twitter changes, new texts appear every second, yet unfortunately many arts organizations are remaining static. Arts organizations need to learn how to maintain exciting conversations and provide updates online. More than ever before people want to be involved with the behind the scenes of what goes on at the theater. At one time, the performing arts thought it was important to only let their audiences see the final, polished product. Now, people want to know what went into the production, they want to meet the performers and learn about what goes on behind the curtain.

While for many email is still the preferred electronic communication tool, it is the way of the past for this generation. Teenagers today are using Facebook, Twitter, and numerous other websites, and are texting each other information. Arts organizations need to try to be in tune with these preferences for communication. While email blasts are still effective for many audiences, these audiences are most likely made up on teens' parents or grandparents. However, this knowledge could also be useful when reaching out to teenagers' parents. As a teenager, parents are still often involved in making decisions about how their child spends his or her time. It is important than for arts organizations to learn how to maintain relationships with both teenagers and their parents so that each generation can remind the other of the upcoming opportunities that are available.

Many teenagers find email to be too slow a form of communication. Teenagers today "are part of the 'want-it-now generation. They don't have time to wait, and they're

surrounded by devices and environments that feed their impatience and restlessness.”²³ With advancing technology in computers and cell phones, they can instantly receive and process information. They can also give their followers minute-by-minute updates into what they are doing in their own lives. Because of becoming accustomed to having constant, changing information as well as instant gratification for items that they post, most teenagers believe that email is too slow and they simply will not take the time to read an email because its content is longer. It is important that arts organizations consider how they can get involved with teens through social media, such as Facebook groups and fan pages, and identify what methods work best with this age group.

Arts organizations also need to be aware of the fine line that they walk with teenagers in regards to communication. They have to be cool enough that teens want to friend them on Facebook and follow them on Twitter, but not overbearing enough that teens feel like another adult is watching them. Arts organizations need to fully comprehend what their relationship with this group is and determine when it is effective and appropriate for them to reach out to teenagers.

Barriers that Could Keep Teenagers from Arts Organizations

This research also indicated specific barriers that can keep teenagers away from arts organizations. These include lack of experience with the performing arts and not knowing proper etiquette for performance venues, teenagers’ family lives, the arts organization’s venue, the generational divide in audiences, programming selections,

23. Benson, Peter, *SPARKS: How Parents Can Help Ignite the Hidden Strengths of Teenagers* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 6.

money and the ticket-purchasing process, accessibility and transportation, lack of arts education, the role of the arts in popular culture, stressors for teenagers including demands on their time, and their social identity and relationship with friends. The arts managers who were interviewed discussed the ways that each of their arts organizations tries to overcome these barriers in order to build more successful relationship with their audiences.

Lack of Experience/Etiquette

One of the reasons young adults might feel uncomfortable in these performing arts venues is because they have never learned proper etiquette for how to behave during a performance. People are often afraid of what they do not know. If teenagers feel as though they do not know what to do or where to go at the theater, they will feel discomfort which will prevent them from fully enjoying a performance and may deter them from coming back to see another production.

Family Life

For many teenagers, their interests and activities are shaped by their family life. Teenagers who come from supportive family homes may be more likely to get involved in arts activities because they have parents who will drive them to meetings, come to events to cheer them on, and encourage their passion. When young people do not have this type of support system, they can be more tentative in getting involved, simply because they do not have the encouragement that they need.

However, arts organizations should not overlook children who do not come from strong family backgrounds. In some cases, teenagers begin attending arts events and getting involved in arts activities because, for them, the arts represent an escape from everyday life. Through the arts, they are able to get far away from the reality of their lives and have time to relax and be a truer form of themselves. These types of activities can also provide them with the encouragement and support that they are missing in their home lives, including giving them positive adult role models and mentors.

Venue

Another barrier for teens attending performances could also be the physical space itself. The performance venues for a number of arts organizations are very traditional in their layout. They include a large stage, a series of seats in Orchestra, Mezzanine, and Balcony locations, have ornate chairs, and have an overall feel of elegance and glamor. But for many teens, a location like this feels “old” and “antique.” Teenagers are used to spaces where they can lounge and be comfortable. From movie theaters with reclining chairs to hanging out at a friend’s house, young people enjoy being comfortable. Most theaters and performance venues are fancier than they might feel comfortable in.

Generational Divide and Programming Implications

Some scholars argue that the reason that teenagers are not comfortable going to the theater or a performance hall is not the space itself. While these venues can be intimidating for many people, let alone teenagers, more mature audiences do not help this situation since some of these people view teenagers as troublemakers. Similarly,

teenagers are not inclined to spend their time in a place where they are surrounded by “old people.” They want to hang out in hip locations where they can be surrounded by their peers. So, in some ways, the age gap at arts performances is helping to perpetuate itself.

This divide is also partially a result of the programming choices by arts organizations. Many of the shows and performances that arts organizations choose are directed towards audiences in their 40s and older. The medium age of arts attenders is rising and similarly the percentage of audience aged between 18 and 34 is dropping. In 1992 the medium age of arts attenders was 42. By 2002, the medium age of arts attenders was 45.²⁴ Individual art forms saw more dramatic leaps, such as the medium age for jazz audiences which jumped from 37 to 43 and for classical music which jumped from 44 to 49.²⁵ More dramatically, the percentage of audience aged 18-34 has dropped. In 1992, 38.3-percent of ballet audiences were in this age range, but by 2002 only 25.1-percent of audiences were 18-34 years old.²⁶ These results beg the question if the same programming is less appealing to the up-and-coming generation.

Many arts organizations are successfully carrying out their mission of bringing a specific type of performing arts to audiences. As an example, this is clear with Arena Stage, which demonstrates its commitment to theatrical productions that exude the American spirit. However, arts organizations may need to start exploring programming

24. Kolb, Bonita, *Marketing for Cultural Organisations* (London: Thomson, 2005), 56.

25. Ibid., 56.

26. Ibid., 56.

that can continue to carry out their mission while also appealing to a younger demographic. This does not mean shaping an entire season to make it into something that would only be appealing to young people, but instead finding a way to integrate their audience base.

Money and Purchasing Tickets

Most of the individuals that I spoke with seemed of the opinion that marketing to young adults in this age group is not financially beneficial to an organization because teenagers do not have a disposable income in the same way that more mature adults do. When they think of teenagers, they do not see a way of making more income to cover the cost of productions and performances. However, many arts managers noted that their organizations do outreach to this age group because it is an important way to connect with the community and because it serves as a way to gain the attention of foundations and earn grant money. Reaching out to this demographic is also particularly important for non-profit organizations whose missions specifically reference young people and supporting them in some way, usually through education.

Some of the arts managers interviewed for this study disagreed with the argument that teenagers do not have access to money and, therefore, that it is not beneficial for arts organizations to market directly to them. One arts manager pointed out, “When teenagers want to go to a concert for the latest pop sensation, they find the money to buy the tickets. Yet, they don’t come to arts performances that are only a fraction of the price.”²⁷ While

27. Ava Spece, DC Youth Orchestra, in-person interview with author, January 25, 2011.

some teens from lower socio-economic backgrounds might not have the funds to go to performances, most teenagers find money to pay for their iPods, their music downloads, their phones, and other new technology. This money could be diverted into the arts, but arts organizations need to discover if there are factors other than money that might keep young adults away. “We keep trying to fix the symptoms as opposed to the problem,” said one arts manager.²⁸

For many arts organizations, reaching out to teenagers is primarily used to gain grant money. Having grant money is good for arts organizations because it not only provides funding that is valuable to them in carrying out their missions, but it also validates the work that they do and brings about notoriety. Grants improve the reputation of an organization. Once an arts organization receives grant money from one foundation, doors can be opened to other funding opportunities, including other grants as well as private donations. Fortunately, some organizations recognize there are benefits to reaching out to teenagers beyond grant opportunities, including the impact that the arts can have on their lives.

Arts organizations could also use technological advances to update their ticket purchasing methods. People are most likely to abandon their carts with items they were about to purchase if the ticket-buying process is more complicated than they feel like dealing with in the moment. Arts organizations that have easy ticket buying processes seem to find better and more regular success in ticket sales. Easy ticket buying processes

28. Ava Spece, DC Youth Orchestra, in-person interview with author, January 25, 2011.

are particularly relevant for teenagers who use technology every day and have high expectations for how organizations use technology. Making an investment in simplifying the ticket-buying process would be appealing to a wide range of ticket buyers as well as potential audience members.

Many arts organizations also reach younger audiences because they give tickets to educational groups. The Arena Stage gives 1,200 tickets to D.C. schools each year.²⁹ These tickets allow for students to get a new experience of the arts but they do not help the organization to make money. An arts organization needs to make the decision of what needs to be done in order to accomplish its mission. In many cases, this may mean discounting or giving away tickets in order to appeal to a wider demographic. For example, High 5 Tickets to the Arts in New York City goes so far as to offer high school students easy to obtain, discounted tickets to a wide range of cultural events. By showing a school ID and paying \$5, teenage students can choose to attend any of dozens of events, ranging from theatrical productions to ballet performances and music concerts. The organization has also now expanded to include teenagers from any state and from around the world. This small program that was created just for teens in New York City is having major impacts on teenagers and the arts on a much larger scale.

Accessibility/Transportation

In a metropolitan area like Washington, D.C. arts organizations need to learn how to make their organizations accessible to a wide range of people across the geographic area. In some cases that might mean the organization moving to a venue that is closer to

29. Stacey Stewart, Arena Stage, in-person interview with author, January 10, 2011.

public transportation, building a parking lot on part of their property, or even paying for shuttles to provide customers with shuttle service to their performances. For teenagers, transportation can be particularly challenging. They might not have the money for public transportation. In D.C., each student receives a metro card to get to school. Sometimes they can use this card to get to other after-school events. Teenagers usually do not have access to a car, particularly in a large city, so driving and paying for parking is probably not a viable option for them. Because of these limitations, teens often rely on their parents to drive them. However, as previously discussed, not all teenagers have a strong family unit and the support of their parents.

Lack of Arts Education

The value of the arts needs to be stressed even more by arts organizations in today's day and age when the arts are being pushed out of the classroom. Because of a number of reasons, ranging from budget deficits to a priority on mathematics and sciences to a focus on test scores, some people argue that students do not have the same opportunities in the arts as they once had. Classes were once dedicated to arts education, but now at many schools the arts are incorporated only through once a week classes and assemblies, if at all. This segregation and somewhat elimination of the arts is damaging to teenagers because it limits their scope of knowledge and gives them the impression that the arts are a lesser subject. By not investing the time and resources into theater, dance, and music programs and classes, teenagers are seeing that our culture does not care about the arts. Some would argue that this disregard for the arts is creating a barrier that is difficult to overcome. Since actions speak louder than words, by not having the

arts present in young adults' lives, this opinion for the arts could carry on to yet another generation. This type of cycle can be absolutely life-threatening to arts organizations that rely on school systems to give students a grounding in arts education.

The importance placed on testing has also made it difficult for arts organizations to create successful partnerships with schools to teach young adults about the arts.

Worried teachers are so focused on having students do well on tests, that they cannot find time for arts organizations to supplement the diminished arts offerings in their schools.

This is particularly frustrating for arts organizations because they are willing to commit the resources to bringing arts education into these classrooms to fill the deficit that they see, but they are not allowed to by the schools. This can be particularly difficult in

Washington, D.C., where there are high levels of educator and administrative turnover in schools. When an arts organization does get a program successfully on its feet, there is usually a staff turnover at the school which makes the arts organizations need to reintroduce themselves to school and begin to build a relationship from scratch again.

The focus on mathematics and sciences has also diminished the role of the arts and the humanities. In a time when technology plays such an important role, students are being encouraged to study engineering, chemistry, calculus, and other more scientifically-related subjects that can help teens to one day develop new technologies. Also, these subjects are usually connected to the highest paying professions. Since a career in the arts does not often promise a high salary, many teenagers are encouraged instead to study fields that will give them higher incomes.

Parents also contribute to these perceptions. They often encourage their children to be involved with the arts, but as soon as their child wants to major in dance or theater or music in college, most parents encourage them to also study another field, like teaching, which would give them more opportunities for jobs. This can present a challenge for arts educators at all levels, who are struggling for consistent parental support for their students.

This desire to follow certain career paths is indeed becoming more and more evident in the high school system more than ever before. Tracking separates students into different paths. Students need to choose what subjects they want to focus on, and unfortunately this makes many students who have an interest in the arts leave them behind because of their need to take higher level classes in sciences, mathematics, and other subjects. The arts are reduced to electives, classes young adults can only take if they fit into their schedule. Oftentimes with the need to fulfill many core requirements, there is not space for the arts, and since the arts have been eliminated as a core requirement in many schools, students do not receive the arts exposure that they need. As a result, many teenagers are not able to become the well-rounded people that they wish to be.

Arts organizations are also combatting the culture as a whole, which sees the arts as something that may be entertaining, but not as something that has real value.

However, music lights up more parts of the brain at once than any other subject.³⁰

Similar results in other forms of performing arts show the value that the arts have in

30. *The Music Instinct: Science and Song*, DVD, directed by Elena Mannes (Boston, MA: Public Broadcasting System, 2009).

engaging higher level thinking. The arts engage individuals in more cognitive processes than other subjects. Yet, people only find the arts worthy when partnered with another “more important” core subject. As a result the arts are often justified through transfer, or “the ability to extend what has been learned in one context to new contexts”³¹ such as other subjects. Despite strong arguments for their worth, in many cases the arts are not valued in themselves by the general public.

Arts in Culture

That being said, arts organizations are also now facing new battles with the success of movies and television shows focused around high school arts groups. With *High School Musical* and its subsequent films, a new generation became attracted to the saga of teenagers who wanted to be in the school play, but who were struggling to maintain their identities, such as being the star of the basketball team. With catchy songs mixed into the films, youth were able to connect with the appealing characters who were their peers, and who were facing the same types of issues that they faced.

The television show *Glee* is currently helping to carry on this craze started by *High School Musical*. Every week teenagers and young adults are tuning in to follow the story of a group of high schoolers who are trying to take their glee club to the national competition. Along the way, the group performs popular music ranging from today’s pop artists to Broadway classics. However, while this show has certainly sparked people’s interest in high school choirs, it in some ways does damage to real arts organizations

31. National Research Council, *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 2002), 51.

because it gives people “unrealistic expectations of what happens in the arts.”³² Teens sometimes see the characters on *Glee* perform songs and dance numbers, but they do not see the practice and work that goes on in order to achieve it. As a result, some teenagers join arts organizations and become disappointed when their expectations cannot be met. It is important for arts organizations to make it clear to teens the many opportunities that do exist in the arts and the fun things that they can do as a part of their program, even though it may not live up to their unrealistic expectations for what being involved in a high school choir or theater program is like from what they have seen on television. This is a real and growing challenge that arts organizations must face.

Stressors for Teens/Demands on Time

The demands on students’ time also threaten their relationship with the arts. Today’s generation of teenagers is overbooked. There are high expectations placed upon them. As they get farther up in middle school and high school, academic demands and extracurricular activities place stress upon them. Arts organizations find themselves competing against other school activities since in many cases they run at the same times when arts organizations want to hold their classes or events.

On top of these commitments to activities and homework, teenagers also suffer from social pressures placed on teens by their peers and other societal demands. Sometimes teens prefer to be involved with the activities at their school for a number of reasons, including ease of transportation and the social scene at their school. As will be

32. Mimi Flaherty Willis, Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts, phone interview with author, January 24, 2011.

discussed in the next section, attendance for arts performances and activities is most strongly influenced by whether someone's friends are going. In the same way, teenagers want to be where their friends are. Usually that means sticking with the school activity as opposed to what might be offered outside of it. One arts manager explained that you can tell when a teenager is going to go far in the arts because "that's the kid who is in all the school plays along with our organization's productions."³³ When students learn how to master having a busy schedule, they tend to be more successful in all of their activities.

Social Scene/Friends and Identity

Since the number one determining factor as to whether someone will attend an arts performance is whether their friends are attending, it is important to consider the social aspect that the arts present for teenagers as well. It is easy to attend an event that one's friends are going to, but it is more difficult to go to something by him or herself. During high school years, teens begin to form identities and decide how they want other people to perceive them. They also worry about the labels and identities that other people are placing upon them. For some people, being the "band geek" could be social suicide or being involved in theater could mean that you are "gay." Teenagers can be cruel to each other. Arts organizations need to be aware of how teens connect and identify with their organizations.

Understanding the relative importance of peer group influences and childhood arts education is very important in teaching arts organizations how they should reach out to teenagers. In a study in 1985, it was found that if you visited cultural locations as a child

33. Brett Crawford, Imagination Stave, in-person interview with author, January 31, 2011.

and had received childhood arts education, 48-percent of those people, who also had friends going to events, attended arts events. If their friends did not attend, only eight-percent went to arts events. Similarly the group that did not go to arts events as a child but had childhood arts education had a 51-percent attendance rate when their friends went and only eight-percent attendance rate when their friends did not.³⁴ Individuals who did not receive arts education as children went 23-percent and 24-percent of the time when their friends went, but still only eight-percent and six-percent when their friends did not.³⁵ These figures show how crucial it is to appeal to groups of friends and not just individuals. People want to spend time socializing with others at arts events. They do not want to attend events by themselves. It is important for arts organizations to consider this information and create situations where teenagers can want to attend with their friends.

Factors that Foster Teenage Engagement

This research has also revealed several factors that have been successful in fostering teenage engagement with arts organization. Arts organizations are more likely to have positive relationships with teenagers if their organization has passionate employees who are dedicated to working with teenagers and an education component that teaches teenagers how to interpret the arts and life skills connected to the arts. It is also important for performing arts organizations to gather feedback from the teenage

34. Kotler, Philip and Joanne Scheff, *Standing Room Only: Strategies for Marketing the Performing Arts* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1997), 73.

35. Ibid., 73.

demographic and to use that feedback to shape and improve their programs. Listening to feedback makes teenagers feel valued and makes them more likely to support that arts organization, thereby improving their relationship with the arts in general.

Passionate Employees

The arts organizations that are the most successful in their outreach to teenagers find this success because of passionate individuals that work within their organizations. Like with any non-profit organization, employees are not working there just to make money. It is about more than just a job to them. One of the reasons that they work there is because of a commitment to the organization's mission and the positive influences that that organization has on the community. With arts organizations and their outreach to teenagers, the most successful programs encountered in this study were spearheaded by motivated individuals who were passionate about both the arts and the difference that the arts can make in teenagers' lives. Like with any work, when employees were truly committed to the cause, they put more energy into it and see more results.

For arts organizations and their outreach to teenagers, people are driven to do this work because of the many benefits that the arts can have in the development of a young person's life. As discussed throughout this paper, the arts can teach important social, critical thinking, and interpretation skills. Usually the individuals who are most supportive of teenage arts programs are so because of either very positive experiences with the arts in their teenage years or because of the desire to fill a void that they experienced in their lives. For people who had the opportunity to be involved in numerous arts groups as a teenager, they know on a personal level how these interactions

changed them and made them into the people that they are today. They can easily name the benefits of such programming and they can also more clearly identify and articulate the problems in the arts activities that exist for teenagers. This inside knowledge can help them to form stronger and more effective arts programs at the organization that they work for today.

For individuals who did not have the opportunity to be involved in the arts as teenagers, they tend to be acutely aware of what led them to the arts at an older age and what could have attracted them to the arts as teenagers if the opportunities were available. This group is usually particularly motivated to build successful programs at arts organizations because they have self-identified as being arts people and sought out arts activities when they were not available to them. Therefore, they know what it feels like to be a teenager looking for something to do with their time and they can apply their experience to creating arts programs that are both appealing and entertaining for this demographic.

Education/Teaching Life Skills and How to Interpret the Arts

The arts can be a valuable tool for helping teenagers cope with a number of issues, from difficult home lives to special needs to just the everyday emotional problems that teenagers face. Sometimes being a teenager can be a roller coaster ride of emotions. The arts can give teenagers an effective and safe outlet for their feelings. The arts can also teach teenagers how to effectively express themselves. By participating in theater, teens can get over their fears of speaking in public and can learn tips about how to articulate and project so as to make sure that they are heard. By learning how to interpret

theater, high schoolers can learn how to break down complicated situations, assess what is going on, and find ways to solve problems.

From a social standpoint, the arts can teach people the important skills of collaboration and empathy. Teenagers can learn what it means to be a part of a team and the important role that every individual plays in the success of the whole. They can also learn how to listen to others and how to step into someone else's shoes. Through acting, people take on another character and get inside the mind of someone else. Learning how other people think and process the events surrounding them is very important into learning how to have successful relationships with other people. This type of empathy can be carried on to any field later in life. As one arts manager explained, he has an alumnus who went through their young actors program for several years. He is now a doctor and came back and told the organization that he learned how to speak to and treat his patients along with his bedside manners through his participation in their theater program.³⁶ These types of values can have lifelong benefits. From public speaking, to learning how to express one's self, to learning how to listen to others and work as a team, the arts teach valuable tools that can be applied across any discipline.

The performing arts can also teach teenagers important spatial and movement skills. Since dance, theater, and even music involve movement elements, the arts can be a form of physical therapy as well as emotional therapy. Through movement, youth with special needs can become more confident in their body control and expression skills. Young people without special needs can continue to build their flexibility, learn the

36. Mitch Mattson, Arena Stage, phone interview with author, January 21, 2011.

importance of taking care of their bodies with proper exercise, and gain a greater knowledge of how their body moves and works. Movement gives teens a physical and outward way of showing their inner emotions.

One successful program is Voices of Now, run by Arena Stage for over seven years. Each ensemble is made up of 15 young people who, after making it into the group through an audition process, meet after school once or twice a week from January through May.³⁷ In this group, teens are given only a title which they then use to create a collage performance, made up of poetry and scenes tied together. Through this program, these youth are “a part of theater from inception to creation” and they become “a part of a community through performance.”³⁸ This program allows teenagers to develop important skills including collaboration, self-expression, and leadership.

Listening to Feedback

Since social media gives teenagers the opportunity to share their opinions, arts organizations should learn how to capitalize on this feedback and other responses that they receive expressing opinions and suggestions. For instance, Imagination Stage listened to feedback from their teen participants and decided to change one of their workshops from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on a Saturday to 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. The class that was originally scheduled for the morning was going to be cancelled because of lack of participants. However, with this new afternoon into evening time, the class was filled

37. Mitch Mattson, Arena Stage, phone interview with author, January 21, 2011.

38. Ibid.

and also had a waiting list.³⁹ This is an example of how arts organizations need to listen to their audience and try to make accommodations for what best suits them. For teenagers, they do their best work in the afternoon and evening. Imagination Stage saw this need and chose to change their more traditional layout for workshops and replace it with a more innovative and effective plan for scheduling.

Imagination Stage was able to make these successful changes because they listened to the teenage audience that they were trying to serve. By listening to what teens are saying, arts organizations are letting teenagers know that they care about them and their ideas. This type of interaction makes teens feel like they are valued. As a result, they would be more likely to be committed to an organization that treats them with this type of respect.

39. Brett Crawford, Imagination Stage, in-person interview with author, January 31, 2011.

CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Recommendations

As identified and explained in the preceding chapter, there are numerous factors that this research points to as being helpful or hurtful when an arts organization tries to build a successful relationship with teenagers. This chapter attempts to identify methods that arts organizations could implement to be more successful with each of these factors. Since it is a growing concern for arts organizations who are trying to keep up with younger audiences, technology and communication is discussed first.

Technology and Communication

Technology allows arts organization to “intersect with teenagers where they are in their world”⁴⁰ by providing ease of access as well as mechanisms to establish a closer relationship with youth through providing clear expectations for audience members. Organizations accomplish this through Twitter, Facebook, and videos, as well as sharing information about the venue and preparation for the performance through Facebook, texts, and website content. Better yet, getting a firsthand account by teenagers to share with this demographic could be helpful because this generation values the opinions of their peers. Arts organizations should perhaps consider recruiting a team of teenagers to

⁴⁰ Brett Crawford, Imagination Stage, in-person interview with author, January 31, 2011.

attend performances and tweet reviews, post summaries, and rave about highlights on Facebook and other sites. Arts organizations could also use new technology to give teenagers a clear idea of the expectations for them as audience members. They could do this through a Twitter feed or an amusing video.

Arts organizations could even consider a more radical approach to connecting with teenagers, including designating specific times of a performance as “text times.” In these moments, teenagers could connect with their peers, which they are used to doing so often, to post their thoughts or perhaps they could text a question or thought to someone who could speak about the show in real-time. New approaches that reach out to teenagers like the ones listed above, could become valuable in carrying on the conversation after the show, and potentially convincing the teen to come back to see the next production.

Arts organizations should consider making videos that would give people an inside perspective. For teenagers especially, this type of video would help them to feel more connected and perhaps even more comfortable attending a performance. Teenagers also do not want to receive too many texts from anyone other than their friends, so arts organizations need to be aware of the amount that they are reaching out to teenagers and they need to make accommodations to make sure that the amount of interactions are acceptable to their teenage demographic.

Overcoming Barriers that Could Keep Teenagers from Arts Organizations

Lack of Experience/Etiquette

It is important that arts organizations find ways to teach teenagers, and all new audience members, what the expectations for their behavior are during a performance, so that they can come to the theater fully prepared to participate and enjoy the art form. Knowing how regular arts goers would participate makes new audience members feel informed, or like they were part of the “in crowd.” Having this sense of belonging, instead of feeling like an outsider, could make the difference in the retention of an audience member. Arts organizations need to go out of their way in order to give teenagers, and all new audience members, positive experiences with the arts. They could accomplish this by training ushers to be particularly friendly and courteous and to be aware of first-time individuals’ needs. They could also create videos or an attendance guide on their website, so that teens know what they should wear, when they should applaud, and other details that could be helpful in making them feel comfortable at the performance.

Family Life

Arts organizations should carefully consider the family lives of the teenage demographic that they are trying to reach out to. For some teenagers, adults at an arts organization could give them the mentorship that they do not receive from their parental figures. Arts organizations need to work to be a supportive environment for youth, especially teenagers who are going through a lot both physically and emotionally.

Performing arts organizations should also consider ways that they could make their productions family-friendly for teenagers. By that, I mean that while teenagers do not necessarily want to hang out with their parents, they are more likely to come if their parents can provide them with transportation or the money to attend. Perhaps by putting on a show that appeals to teenagers at the same time as there is a production that is more adult-focused, adults would be more willing to go out of their way to bring their maturing children to the event. Arts organizations need to consider ways of making themselves family-friendly, while still giving high schoolers their own opportunities to be independent.

Venue

If an arts organization has the opportunity to build its own venue, it should carefully consider adding comfortable spaces that encourage people to hang out with friends and engage in conversations. While the mission of a performing arts center might be focused on the content that is being shown on stage, in order for this content to have long-reaching effects people need to have the opportunity to process, discuss, and learn other people's perspectives on that content. This can only be done in spaces where people feel comfortable. Concrete floors and walls might not create this result. This is particularly true for teenagers, who want to be comfortable everywhere they are. To attract this demographic, venues need to be inviting spaces that teenagers can see themselves spending time in. This may mean including comfortable couches, areas with new technology, and spaces that they feel like they could "own," where they could talk to their peers without feeling like they were invading adults' space.

Arts organizations also need to consider unconventional ways to use traditional spaces. The venue may scream formality, but maybe there are ways that an arts organization can make a younger generation feel comfortable there. It could have a young people's night, where jeans are acceptable dress code and special finger foods (like French fries and mozzarella sticks) are offered. Instead of having a performance on the stage, hold the performance outside the theater, or in the lobby, or backstage. Placing the performance in a different space will draw teenagers in because of its uniqueness.

For teenagers, they might be particularly drawn to events that take place near movie theaters and malls where they spend their time. Arts organizations should also consider flash mob performances. A growing trend for the younger generation, a flash mob occurs when a number of people seemingly appear out of nowhere for some common purpose. This type of event can easily be coordinated with today's technology, through texting or Facebook and Twitter posts. While in some cases flash mobs can become destructive, for the arts flash mobs can be an exciting new way for an arts organization to get a message out about their organization. By having performers for an upcoming show perform a dance number or other exciting scene in some location with an unsuspecting audience, people will become drawn in and want to know more about the group that just unexpectedly entertained them. This could attract them to attend a planned performance at the arts organization's venue.

Generational Divide and Programming Implications

Performing arts organizations need to consider making programming choices that are appealing and appropriate to the teenage demographic. For some arts organizations,

this may mean changing one production in their season to something that is attractive for teenagers. This production might be something that is amusing or that addresses teenagers' concerns or their current life experiences. By changing one production in this way, it could be enough to hook people and to persuade them to come back to other productions in the season. Once an arts organization gets people through the door, it can be slightly easier to persuade them to come back. The important first step is to get them there and into the seats. By considering the teenage demographic when making programming choices and by changing marketing campaigns to appeal to this demographic, arts organizations will find greater success in diversifying the age range of their audiences.

Money and Purchasing Tickets

With more people accessing the internet through their phones than ever before, arts organization should consider creating an application or mobile version of their website that could facilitate purchasing tickets to performances. By creating an application that would make the process easy and something that people can do on the go, arts organizations would most likely not only improve ticket sales, but also appeal to the younger demographic who often have their thumbs attached to their phones. This type of investment could benefit over the long-run because people are more likely to purchase tickets when it is something easy for them to do. Teenagers, who live on their phones, would probably prefer having an application for their phones for buying tickets, as it is the approach most familiar to them. Also, many teens from lower socio-economic

backgrounds have web-enabled phones but no home computer. Making this change would, therefore, give a wider range of people access to the ticket-purchasing process.

Arts organizations also need to consider how they price their tickets, particularly differential pricing, which means “to price events differently based on demand.”⁴¹ While some organizations do discounted tickets for teenagers and college-aged audiences, there can sometimes be a disconnect within arts organizations, particularly their marketing and ticket sales departments. One arts manager shared with me that their marketing department finds discount tickets helpful because they can use them to create a campaign that would be appealing to younger audiences. However, people in charge of ticket sales in their organization often do not find this type of campaign helpful because they could have otherwise sold tickets at a higher price. This debate on discounted tickets for younger audiences is going on in arts organizations across the country. Perhaps an increase in attendance, even though tickets are sold at a lower price, would be worth it because it would help offset costs that are already being incurred for the production and would help fill the theater. In order to attract a younger generation, when pricing their tickets arts organizations should keep in mind the amount of money that teenagers would be willing to spend or the perceived value of the tickets. If the ticket price and the perceived value are at different levels, an arts organization will have problems bringing the desired demographic in for its productions.

41. Kolb, Bonita, *Marketing for Cultural Organisations* (London: Thomson, 2005), 190.

Accessibility/Transportation

It is important for arts organizations to come up with solutions for transportation or it can create a real physical barrier between an organization and its desired teenage audience. This is particularly true in the greater Washington, D.C. area. Public transportation can be an option, but the venue needs to be close enough to a metro stop that people do not find it inconvenient. Similarly, having parking also improves the likelihood that people would attend, but usually arts organizations need to charge for parking because it can be a major cost for the organization to obtain and maintain it. However, since most teens in the city do not own their own car, it is not likely that they would be able to take advantage of this opportunity anyway.

Arts organizations need to consider options for how they can improve the transportation to their facility if public transportation is not doing the job. Arena Stage shared with me that their insurance does not cover transportation costs, so if they take teens in their program to a performance or activity somewhere else in the city, they have to carefully consider how they will get there.⁴² Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts provides a shuttle from the West Falls Church metro stop to Filene Center facility.⁴³ By having this shuttle available, albeit for a small fee, arts patrons are more willing to make the trip from Washington, D.C. out to the Virginian suburbs. Making these types of transportation accommodations for their audience members could make a big difference in the number of ticket sales.

42. Stacey Stewart, Arena Stage, in-person interview with author, January 10, 2011.

43. Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts, <http://www.wolftrap.org/>, Accessed 4 February 2011.

Lack of Arts Education

Although the importance placed on testing has made it difficult for arts organizations to create successful partnerships with schools, it is important for arts organizations to continue to forge ahead in order to teach young adults about the arts. Dedicated staff members need to continue to reach out to schools, even after a staff change, and try to find a committed point person at that school. If the contact person is leaving, sometimes an organization can have that person recommend someone who can replace him or her as a liaison. This often saves the organization from having to start its relationship with the school from scratch because it gives them an in with someone else in the organization.

Above all, it is important for arts organizations to remember that the people that they talk to at schools are also educators and are often committed to the same cause: teaching the next generation. Arts organizations need to make sure that the message that they have to share with educators is concise and stresses the importance of both the arts and implementing whatever specific program that they have to offer. An organization can often find it easier to get schools on board with their plans when their programs take place after school. If a program takes place after school, it does not take away from school time and therefore makes a school's inclination toward the program greater. It is also important that the arts program have funding from the arts organization or other sources. While a school might be willing to volunteer classroom space, basic school supplies, and maybe even teacher support, all schools have different levels of funds available, with some not being able to supply anything to the program.

It is also important for arts organizations to consider the amount of education that their audiences are receiving since education is often thought of as “the most important external factor influencing the attendance decision.”⁴⁴ While it has yet to be proven that “exposing young people to culture at school leads to a life-time of cultural participation,” it is true that “consumers cannot desire what they do not know.”⁴⁵ Arts education in schools can play an important role in bringing teenagers enjoyable arts experiences. These arts experiences could have a lasting impact and encourage teenagers to be involved in the arts in the future.

Beyond arts organizations reaching out to supplement arts education, it is important for parents and community members to speak out about the importance of the arts in schools. By mobilizing people, this force could grow and perhaps implement change in the school district or a higher level. People need to speak out about what they believe in order for change to take place. Therefore, one of the ways to have more arts education programs for teenagers is to make schools see that the community thinks it is important and that it is worth having the school district spend funds to maintain it.

Arts in Culture

Although it may be a challenging time to raise funding and the general public often runs hot and cold with its views on the arts, it is important for arts organizations to do what they can to build and maintain a positive perspective of the arts in culture. Arts

44. Kolb, Bonita, *Marketing for Cultural Organisations* (London: Thomson, 2005), 105.

45. Ibid., 105.

organizations should figure out ways that they can build upon the success of *High School Musical* and *Glee* in order to give people real, engaging experiences with the arts. Since people are being exposed to these forms of entertainment, now is the perfect time to use them as a jumping off point to bring people into the real life world of the arts. That might mean changing some of the organization's programming to appeal to this potential new audience, but it would be worthwhile in the long-run in terms of both developing a larger audience base and in financially supporting the organization's mission. Arts organizations need to look for ways that they can use trends in popular culture to attract people to the arts, as opposed to letting these trends further separate people from the arts and their organizations.

Stressors for Teens/Demands on Time

Since teenagers are living busier lives than any generation before them, parents and teachers should teach teens time management skills that can help them to better succeed in their activities and homework. Adults also need to be aware of whether or not their teenager has too many commitments. If the teenager does, adults might need to help him or her prioritize activities so that the teenager can develop a happier work-life balance.

It is important for arts organizations to try to help teenagers learn how to manage their time because once a person drops out from participating in the arts it can be difficult to pick it back up again. For example, if a musician puts down their instrument for a

year, it is unlikely that they will pick it up again.⁴⁶ Something else will always come up. The arts require commitment and practice.

It is also important that role models in a young person's life help him or her to see the value of the arts and of being involved in arts activities. Teenagers need to be taught how to engage with the arts while they are young so that as they get older they will continue to maintain their relationship with it. This may mean learning from the example of adults in their lives to attend arts events, going to arts performances with supportive parents and friends, and choosing to participate in arts activities because they enrich many aspects of their lives, including academic, creative, aesthetic, and social.

Social Scene/Friends and Identity

During high school, a formative time when teenagers are beginning to come into their own, arts organizations need to be aware of the important changes that are taking place in their lives and try to find marketing strategies that are in line with how teens' identify themselves. As teenagers are struggling to figure out what social clique they feel most at home with or trying to pave their own path by showing their individualism, arts organizations need to understand this generation's changing needs and desires. Organizations need to find ways that they can be appealing to not only teens, but their whole group of friends as well. People want to spend time socializing with others at arts events. They do not want to attend events by themselves. It is important for arts

46. Ava Spece, DC Youth Orchestra, in-person interview with author, January 25, 2011.

organizations to consider this information and create situations where teenagers can want to attend with their friends.

Arts organizations also need to find a way to make the arts acceptable within many different identities. In other words, they need to find a way to make their organization and the art form “cool” enough to have everyone from the football team to the choir find it appealing and acceptable. If individuals wrongly believe stereotypes that are connected to the arts, some teenagers may be deterred from arts activities and may not find it acceptable to connect with and participate in the arts until they are grown adults, if ever. Instead, arts organizations need to stress the camaraderie that comes with the arts. They need to make it clear that by going to arts performances and participating in arts programming teens become a part of a social circle, have the opportunity to meet more of their peers, and most importantly can be in an environment where they feel comfortable with their own identity, the one that they chose for themselves.

Factors that Foster Teenage Engagement

Passionate Employees

Since passionate employees are one of the factors in the successful recruitment of teenagers as audience members and arts supporters, it is important that arts organizations foster healthy work environments where employees can enjoy what they are doing while being productive. Employees need to feel that their work is paying off. Arts organizations find better success in all aspects of their work when their employees feel like they are receiving the support that they need. Organizations need to be aware of the work that their staff is doing and they need to give them the funding and volunteer

support that will keep their staff from becoming burnt out. When someone is passionate about a cause he or she finds more energy to commit to working and is better able to argue persuasively for that cause. Passionate employees are what keep non-profits alive and it is important to harness that energy, particularly when trying to bring in new audiences.

Marketing Strategically

Arts organizations need to be aware of how teenagers function, where they hang out, and what their interests are. Marketing to teenagers can be different than any other type of marketing that they do. This generation is being bombarded with messages from advertisements, their peers, teachers, parents, and other adults at every moment of the day. Arts organizations need to find ways to get into teenagers' space and attract them to activities and events. While social media is an important way of reaching out to this age group, arts organizations also need to use other approaches to get their attention.

One group that is using various approaches to attract the teenage demographic is the Columbia Center for the Theatrical Arts (CCTA). CCTA attracts teenagers to its many programs by going to places where teenagers hang out. They send students involved in their program, as well as staff, out into the community to get information out about their organization. Some of the places that they go include movie theaters, malls, roller skating rink, and other local spots where teenagers spend their time.⁴⁷ This type of advertising reaches teens directly and the organization can get a better understanding

47. Melissa Rosenberg, Columbia Center for the Theatrical Arts, in-person interview with author, January 13, 2011.

about the success of their outreach. This method is also effective because it gives teenagers the opportunity to speak with their peers who are already participating in the program. Teens often feel more comfortable talking to people who are the same age as them. As a result, CCTA effectively recruits new people to their program.

CCTA also has strategic marketing approaches for advertising specific productions. They schedule “Marketing Days” when they have the individuals involved in their program, along with their parents and other members of the staff, canvass the surrounding area. The organization sets up a large map of the county, with specific shopping areas and other locations highlighted, and people come in and choose an area to cover. They then take posters and postcards and leave them at stores and other community locations where people can find out about the work that they are doing. By using this grassroots approach, CCTA effectively spreads their message across a wide area without having it cost the organization much money.⁴⁸ This group effort serves as a bonding experience for individuals involved in the program, but it also helps to get their message out to individuals who may not have heard of them otherwise.

As shown through this example with CCTA, it is important for arts organizations to consider the demographic that they are trying to attract and to develop specific, effective plans for reaching out to that group. In the case of teenagers, it is important to go to where they are both in physical location and in their online world. Organizations

48. Melissa Rosenberg, Columbia Center for the Theatrical Arts, in-person interview with author, January 13, 2011.

can do this by marketing strategically using social media and outreach in teenagers' favorite hangouts.

Education/Teaching Life Skills and How to Interpret the Arts

Arts organizations should think about ways that they could further develop teenagers' skills for interpreting and relating to the arts. One way they could do this is by having some type of debriefing session, like a coffeehouse conversation, after performances. This would give teens an opportunity to interact with their peers, but it would also give them the chance to share their views and opinions about a performance. They could ask questions and get feedback from people their age, as well as individuals working for the arts organization. They would have the chance to hear and understand opinions other than their own. This type of experience would be valuable for them because it takes the arts to the next level and incorporates more higher level thinking processes that will allow them to enjoy the arts in a new way. In the future, they would know how to think critically about a performance and, therefore, be able to experience the arts in a deeper and more fulfilling way.

This would also be valuable because it would give teenagers opportunities to learn how to interpret theater. They would have the chance to discuss what they just saw and what it means. This type of exchange of ideas would teach youth how to process arts performances, what they should be looking for, and how to develop a critical eye for the productions that they see. Knowing how to interpret a performance would allow them to more fully enjoy their interactions with the arts and could encourage them to attend more productions.

The performing arts can also teach teenagers important spatial and movement skills. Since dance, theater, and even music involve movement elements, the arts can be a form of physical therapy as well as emotional therapy. Through movement, young adults with special needs can become more confident in their body control and expression skills. Teenagers without special needs can continue to build their flexibility, learn the importance of taking care of their bodies with proper exercise, and gain a greater knowledge of how their bodies move and work. Movement gives teens a physical and outward way of showing their inner emotions. Arts organizations could find ways to teach teenagers how to utilize these approaches to deal with real world problems, giving them a toolbox of life skills that could help them in their everyday lives.

Listening to Feedback

It is important that performing arts organizations listen to what teenagers have to say and try to connect with them because doing so will allow the arts organization to develop and maintain its relationship with this demographic. There are many ways that an arts organization can elicit responses from teenagers to find out what they are thinking and feeling. For instance, a theater could involve teens in the selection process for next year's performance season. Using their input, the theater would develop a season that was also appealing to their generation. Also, a music organization could find out what the preferred times are for teens for a workshop on the weekend and hold the event at the time that the majority of teenagers would attend. This is clearly seen in the example of Imagination Stage included above, where the organization changed its Saturday

workshop to 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. because that is the time that teenagers prefer and when they do their best work.⁴⁹

It is also important for arts organizations to have real conversations with young adults and to find out what they want out of an arts organization. With social media tools, there are more opportunities than ever before to get feedback. Twitter allows for quick responses to ideas. Similarly, Facebook can serve to help facilitate discussions and gather opinions. With these resources, along with texts and emails, arts organizations can receive feedback faster than ever before. It is important for organizations to read through the responses that they receive and implement the suggestions that they feel will help the organization to better fulfill its mission and connect to its community of supporters. This is particularly relevant for organizations that are looking to grow teenage audiences.

Suggestions for Future Research

This research has been limited in scope because of the legal steps necessary to speak with adolescents under the age of 18. People in this age group are considered minors. In order to speak with individuals who are 17 or younger, a researcher needs to receive permission from his or her legal guardian. This would require arranging a meeting with both parent and student, or sending a consent form home to the legal guardian to be signed before meeting with the minor in question. However, in the next stage of this research it is important to meet with teenagers and to hear their direct perspectives on the issues discussed above. Their input would help to fill in any gaps in

49. Brett Crawford, Imagination Stage, in-person interview with author, January 31, 2011.

the information that has been gathered from arts managers and education experts, as well as other published sources. The researcher would need to take care to speak to a diverse range of adolescents who come from varying backgrounds.

The research should also be expanded beyond the greater Washington, D.C. area. While Washington, D.C., Virginia, and Maryland are comprised of people with a wide range of backgrounds and economic levels, it is important to look at how teenagers in other geographic areas engage with the arts. Do they do so in a similar fashion? Expanding the geographic focus would help provide a greater understanding as to the interactions between arts organizations and teenagers across the United States.

This research topic could also be examined more thoroughly. By interviewing more extensively and by exploring certain issues in greater depth, a researcher can draw more conclusions about the relationship between teenagers and arts organizations. This is particularly true in looking into the programs available for at-risk or special needs teens. There are a wide range of arts programs available for these special groups and they function differently than the traditional programs run by arts organizations for teens. At-risk or special needs programs focus more exclusively on how the arts can better people's lives, as opposed to more traditional programs which also focus on how to market to this group in order to develop them into steady audience members.

It would also be informative to do a controlled study of people implementing the strategies discussed in the above sections. This research would give insight as to what approaches are effective and what strategies should be revised. This study would also

allow researchers to see how the teenagers react to each strategy so that each strategy could be evaluated in a modern day context.

Conclusions

While arts organizations have made many strides in their relationship with the teenage audience through arts education, little is being done to cultivate teenagers into regular audience members at performances. Through developing technologies, arts organizations have the opportunity to reach out to this demographic with minimal costs. It is time for arts organizations to consider what relationship they want with teenagers and to put forth the energy and resources necessary to carry out that plan. As proven through this research, the relationship that teenagers could have with arts organizations is far more complex than just serving as a way for organizations to receive grant money. It is important for organizations to understand teenagers and the way that they view the world because one day they will be adults and they will be the primary arts audience which arts organizations need to satisfy. Arts organizations should consider taking steps to further develop their relationship with this younger generation now.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Education Expert Questions:

Teenagers and Arts Education/ Education

1. People always say that high school is a formative time in people's lives. *Would you agree? How so?*
2. When do children begin to recognize and relate to the arts?
3. What approaches, if any, do teachers of high school students use when addressing the arts?
4. Do you think that the reduction of arts programs in high schools has affected the way that teenagers develop?
5. Do students' high school experiences with the arts have an impact on their later relationship with the arts?
6. How do you think the internet and social media have changed high school students' expectations for learning in the classroom?
7. Has the Internet and social media has changed their relationship with the arts?
8. Do you think the arts are valuable to the development of teenagers?

Relationship between teenagers and arts organizations

1. Do teenagers have relationships with organizations outside the classroom and outside informal groups?
2. Are there formal organizations outside schools that work with teenagers on a sustained basis?
3. Should high schools play a more active role in encouraging teenagers to participate with arts organizations? Why or why not?
4. What approaches do you think arts organizations should use when reaching out to teenagers?

Arts Organization Experts Questions:

- 1.) Does your organization reach out to high school students? If so, in what way?
 - a. If yes,
 - i. Why is working with high school students important to you?
 - ii. Do you think that your programming is appealing to teenagers?
Your marketing?
 - b. If not, is your organization looking to develop programs for this segment?

- i. If not, why not? Is it because of financial reasons (assumption that high school students don't have disposable income? Why else?
 - c. What could be the benefits of your organization reaching out to the high school segment? The disadvantages?
- 2.) Do you think high school students can be active supporters of the arts?
- 3.) Does your organization use social media? What types of social media do you use?
- 4.) Are there any ways that you are looking to improve your social media approaches?
- 5.) What could arts organizations do to reach out to high school students? How do you think that your organization could improve your outreach efforts to this demographic?
- 6.) What do you wish you knew about how high schoolers view the arts and your arts organization?
- 7.) What were your own high school experiences with the arts? How do you believe they influenced, if at all, your later relationship with the arts?

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