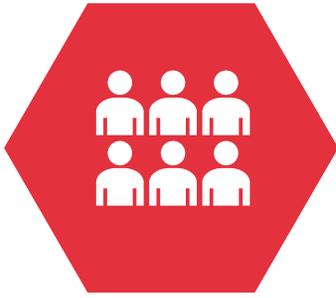


Assessing your Current Audience



In order to determine future goals and direction, it is vital for an organization to know who its audience members are today. For some, audience demographic data may be readily available, while for others it may require some time and work to uncover the details. Small organizations with limited resources and staff may choose to move forward modestly at first. The data gathered in this building block is the starting point in evaluating progress as it provides a snapshot of the current audience and helps assess whether and where progress is made along the way. Future data collection will be compared to this starting point.

Assessing your current audience may include more than gathering demographic data. Audience measurement tools can also uncover useful information such as attendance frequency, motives for participation, how patrons learned about an event, or what they liked.

Putting It Into Action

This block establishes a baseline that your organization will revisit when you evaluate your progress (described later in this document). The goal of this block is to help you make key decisions based on data.

The first step is to identify what data should be collected. This data may include demographics, motivations for attending, and how patrons learned about the event. Once the types of data to be collected are determined, methods to collect the data should be identified. Examples include:

- Point-of-sale data collection. Ticket purchasers would be asked to self-identify according to the demographics being collected (e.g., age, ethnicity, educational background). This method requires staff training and an explanation to patrons of why the data collection is important. This may be conducted on an annual basis or one performance per year.
- Audience survey. A patron survey would be conducted at a performance or event. The survey could be administered by volunteers.
- Direct mail or email survey. A brief survey mailed to all subscribers with an enclosed self-addressed, postage-paid return envelope. This survey can also be administered using email. Completion incentives could be offered to increase the response rate.
- Current membership. Analyze membership and/or ticket sales data to describe your most typical members (e.g., purchaser's residence).

For more information:



racc.org/buildingblocks

Questions to Consider

- What information is already available (e.g., ticket sales, audience surveys, membership statistics)?
- What characteristics describe the most frequent attendees?
- Can the current audience be categorized into subgroups that reflect shared characteristics (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity)?
- What changes have occurred over the last three years? Five years? Ten years?
- Who is available to lead this effort?
- What existing resources can be utilized to complete an assessment (e.g., reaching out to local universities and asking for volunteer support from students needing community service/special projects)?
- Who will create the measurement process and tools?



Resources and Tools

Population and arts audience data already available that are helpful for establishing baselines, making comparisons, and identifying trends include some of the following:

- [United States Census Bureau](#)
- [League of American Orchestras Statistical Reports](#)

Software programs can automate the process of gathering audience data. Some examples are:

- [Total Info](#): A fully integrated box office database program designed for performing arts organizations that manage ticket sales, audience and patron data collection, and financial reporting.
- [Tessitura Arts Enterprise Software](#): Software developed for nonprofit arts and culture organizations that manage transaction and relationship data, marketing/communication efforts, and tracking of audience data and preferences.

“We need metrics and we need to know what the goal is. Until we actually know where we are, we don’t know how to make change. What are the numbers? We need to know our own data and where we are in relation to the community.

—Adriana Baer, Artistic Director, Profile Theatre Company.
From the [2013 Portland Equity in the Arts Consortium \(PEAC\) report](#), a program of the August Wilson Red Door Project

Examples

Miracle Theatre Group/Milagro

Milagro measures the demographics and diversity of its audience through a variety of methods - audience surveys, internal demographic sampling of data collected through ticket sales and audience sign-ins, TRG demographic reports from box office data, and demographic information provided by public agencies and educational institutions. For its audience surveys, Milagro utilizes a [SurveyMonkey survey](#) to collect information about the plays Milagro’s audience experiences, what brought people to the theater, what audience members appreciate most about visiting Milagro, what core values they share with Milagro, as well as the make-up of the audience in terms of personal dimensions relevant to Milagro (e.g. kids in the household under 19, bilingual—English/Spanish, gender, race/ethnicity, age, economic status and Zip code). The theater offers two free tickets as an incentive for audience members who complete the survey. Milagro sends out its survey annually after the end of the season.

The Dance Center of Columbia College Chicago

Audience surveys and focus groups are used successfully by The Dance Center of Columbia College Chicago to assess its audiences. Its surveys request patrons to self-identify which puts them in control of their participation and responses. The [audience survey](#) captures demographic data as well as why participants attend and what they like.

Tip

If resource constraints present a roadblock to success with this building block, consider hiring or engaging an intern to conduct research, collect data, or even assist with project planning and management. Our region is home to several universities and colleges which are excellent resources for finding qualified interns.