

Defining Audience Segments



In this building block, an organization will categorize its current audiences into segments, and identify audience members whose engagement has been low in the past. Organizations should consider the various reasons why they haven't had meaningful engagement from certain communities in the past (e.g., programming that has not been culturally relevant, lack of relationship building with a particular community, or economic barriers). The more accurately the audience segments can be described, the more strategic and focused the programming and outreach can be in the future.

If your organization has limited resources and staff, you can begin with small steps, such as identifying one or two new audience segments. Then, as your organization makes progress in engaging communities, you can revisit this building block to specify other groups to broaden or deepen their engagement.

Putting It Into Action

Your organization might choose to reach out to an entirely new audience segment that is underrepresented, or the goal may be to increase the participation of a segment of the current audience. Reaching out to new communities is not about displacing or alienating current audiences, but expanding and deepening existing engagement. The following are some examples that show the goal and description that an organization might use to identify an audience segment.

- Reach adults with below-median incomes.
- Encourage participation from area families who have school-age children with disabilities.
- Connect with more Spanish-speaking adults under 30 from the tri-county region.
- Engage “new Portlanders,” particularly refugees and immigrants.



For more information:
racc.org/buildingblocks

Questions to Consider

- What is the focus for this diversity and equity initiative (e.g., increasing participation among the current audience or engaging a completely new audience segment)?
- How does your current audience compare to local area demographics? Which groups are underrepresented?
- Who in your organization will lead this effort (e.g., executive director, volunteer, audience development manager, community engagement coordinator)?
- What resources/capacity do you have available to pursue new audience segments?



Resources and Tools

- [Finding your Audience through Market Segmentation](#), from the National Arts Marketing Project, details the underlying rationale and market segmentation process for arts organizations. Included is a case study to illustrate the process and worksheets that organizations can use or adapt for their own needs.
- [Demographic Transformation and the Future of Museums](#) takes a close look at the factors that influence segmentation when seeking to attract more culturally and racially diverse audiences. “But it is strikingly clear that it is up to each museum to develop a nuanced understanding of its community and the very important differences—generational, political, historical, geographic and cultural—that exist within any labeled category.” (p. 6). This document provides thorough coverage on these nuances of segmentation as well as case studies that illustrate some of the new and innovative ways that museums are identifying and attracting new audience segments. The end results are that their audiences better reflect the demographic makeup of their communities. Organizations might also find helpful the guidelines on how to use existing data and gather new data to support equity efforts as well as the list of resources.
- [The Inluseum](#), an initiative to encourage social inclusion in museums, highlights the work of the Whitney Museum of American Art to become more accessible to the Disabled community. This [Inluseum post](#) addresses the ways in which the museum overcame barriers to participation for these community members. Relationship building strategies that involved all stakeholders were key to the organization’s success, which also led to programming and event changes that improved access, equity, and participation.

Example

Oregon Shakespeare Festival

The Oregon Shakespeare Festival held many internal conversations to determine why inclusion was important to the organization and how it would diversify its audience. These decisions resulted in the creation of an [audience manifesto](#) that specifically states intent to diversify audiences in the following areas: (1) age, (2) access issues, (3) race and ethnicity, and (4) socio-economic diversity.

“Portland Center Stage offers a wide variety of price points and engagement opportunities to help us expand the age range and socioeconomic diversity of our audience. We intentionally build partnerships that bridge differences in culture, age and socioeconomic status—and those partnerships help us build awareness, understanding, and social capital between community members who are different from each other.”

—Kelsey Tyler,
Education & Community Programs Director,
Portland Center Stage