Evaluating Progress

This building block enables organizations to come full circle and determine whether they have successfully made progress in increasing equitable access. Measurement is a critical tool for understanding what impact the programming, outreach, and communication strategies had in connecting with a broader range of community members.

Measuring audiences can be challenging. It takes time and effort, and there can be discomfort in asking people to "check a box" to categorize themselves. Because some people choose to identify with multiple categories, such as multiple races or ethnic classifications, we recommend giving people the opportunity to self-identify or self-express their identity beyond any standard classifications whenever possible.

The data gathered in the building block "Assessing your Current Audience" serves as your baseline for assessing your progress. Evaluating progress requires data being collected, analyzed, and used on an ongoing basis.

Putting It Into Action

Now that you have gathered data before and after implementing programming changes and marketing plans to attract new audience segments, you can evaluate the progress of how well your efforts are working to engage the new audience. After about one year of your efforts, track the data to understand if there are any changes in who is attending the programs:

- If data shows an increase in attendance in the audience segment you wish to reach, this indicates that your strategies are working. This success validates the approach and you can continue to expand upon these successes.

- If data shows no change or a decrease in attendance in the audience segment you wish to reach, this is an opportunity to revise your approach. Where is the disconnect happening?

A focus group is a good way to understand the underlying causes of the results. A focus group is a small group of people (6-8) from whom you want to gather specific information. The process includes inviting people from the desired audience segment to attend a discussion group to share their opinions and feedback. In this group, explore why they are or are not attending your events: Is it the programming? Location? Economic barriers? Did they know about it? Once you identify the root cause(s), make appropriate program and marketing changes and continue to evaluate progress.

For more information:
racc.org/buildingblocks

Questions to Consider

- How do you currently measure your audience composition? How will measurements change in the future?

- What type of data will you collect? How will you use the data?

- Who will lead the measurement and analysis effort?

- Who will create the measurement tool, administer it, and analyze the data? Are staff resources or volunteers available to manage the measurement process or are external resources needed?

Resources and Tools

- A Post-Performance Survey from the Boston Lyric Opera was administered after family preview events intended to introduce families to this art form. The survey gathered valuable feedback on this new audience segment the Opera aimed to attract, including demographic information, motivations for attending, and evaluations of the performances, thus benefiting the marketing, education, and programming aspects of the Opera's outreach efforts.

- RACC's year one progress report on Equity and Diversity (November, 2011) shows an example of one way to summarize and examine progress over an identified period of time. A summative progress report is helpful to see the outcomes that an organization has achieved and an opportunity to identify future goals and strategies.

- Getting Started: An Arts Organization Guide to Program Evaluation by the Georgia Council for the Arts introduces the evaluation process for arts organizations and includes information on different types of data that are useful for arts organizations to capture, how to use marketing data, and how to apply these efforts to develop audiences.

- Increasing Cultural Participation: An Audience Development Planning Handbook for Presenters, Producers, and Their Collaborators provides a detailed look at the process of audience development from start to finish, including detailed information on many of the concepts presented in this framework. Case studies, worksheets, sample surveys, and reports in this document are helpful aids that can be adapted for use.

Examples

Houston Grand Opera

HGO utilizes post-performance surveys to measure participation. HGO has also evaluated its impact on the community by recording video interviews of audience members talking about the ways in which they were transformed by their participation.

Theatre Bay Area

To understand how a company might mirror the larger population in which it exists, Theatre Bay Area examined seven different types of diversity (race/ethnicity, age, household income, gender, educational attainment, marital status, and political affiliation) in theater audiences and compared those diversity scores to the same diversities in the general population to create The Arts Diversity Index. It was developed with data from a large existing data collection project—California Cultural Data Project—a powerful online management tool allowing organizations to track trends and benchmark their progress.

"Following our experiments with new programming and new communication channels, including advertising with KUNPTV Univision/ Mundo Fox, MYS saw an immediate uptick in interest from the Hispanic community, and Hispanic enrollment between the 2012-13 and the 2014-15 seasons doubled."

—Diana Scoggins,
Executive Director,
Metropolitan Youth Symphony