



# CAN THE CITY'S BOOM MEAN NEW AUDIENCES FOR **THE SEATTLE SYMPHONY?**

## **A DISCUSSION GUIDE**

This guide explores preliminary insights from Seattle Symphony's audience-building efforts as part of The Wallace Foundation's Building Audiences for Sustainability Initiative



## **ABOUT THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE**

As part of The Wallace Foundation’s Building Audiences for Sustainability (BAS) initiative, the Seattle Symphony used market research to target new audiences in downtown Seattle, where the population is growing at twice the rate of the city’s overall population. To document this work, The Wallace Foundation released *Seattle Symphony: Can the City’s Boom Mean New Audiences for the Seattle Symphony?* in October 2017, as part of a continuing series that records early-stage efforts of performing arts organizations to expand their audiences.

The story and video document the orchestra’s process in pinpointing previously untapped audiences, conducting research through focus groups and surveys, learning the preferences of new and seasoned symphony visitors, and adjusting programming while maintaining core artistic principles.

The purpose of this Discussion Guide is to help arts administrators, board members, and arts practitioners working in organizations of varying budget sizes and disciplines to better understand and apply lessons from Seattle Symphony’s experience to their own organizations. The guide can serve as a teaching aid for small group discussions as well as individual study. It is designed to be used in conjunction with the article and/or video.

Please note that the foundation’s BAS initiative is only one-half completed, with several more years of learning to come (including several reports from a team of independent researchers). As a result, the Seattle Symphony article and video offer preliminary insights only.

This Discussion Guide was created by the League of American Orchestras, the national, nonprofit service organization for orchestra professionals.

## **DOWNLOAD THE SEATTLE SYMPHONY ARTICLE AND VIDEO**

Prior to completing this Discussion Guide, read the article and watch the video that describe Seattle Symphony’s use of market research to more effectively target a new downtown audience.

The Seattle Symphony article and video are available on the following webpage: [wallacefoundation.org/SeattleSymphony](http://wallacefoundation.org/SeattleSymphony)

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# QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

## **A** THE AUDIENCE GOAL

- a.1. The Seattle Symphony made some critical observations about changes in its environment. What demographic changes were taking place in Seattle? Was the Seattle Symphony connecting with the new residents?
- a.2. What shifts are taking place in your community or within your patron base? How is your community's demographic profile changing? What resources could give you insight into new or untapped audience markets in your community?
- a.3. Using local news, reports, and resources, compile a list of economic, political, social, and cultural shifts that might impact the makeup of your community. From your list, brainstorm with your team which changes or shifts might present a new market niche for expanding your audience.

## **B** INITIAL ASSUMPTIONS

- b.1. What assumptions did the Seattle Symphony make about what it termed the New Urban Cultural Consumers (NUCCs)? What predictions were made about their artistic preferences, and what bias do you think led to those assumptions?
- b.2. What biases might be influencing how you understand your target audiences?

## **C** MARKET RESEARCH

- c.1. What research instruments did the Seattle Symphony use to learn more about this potential audience?
- c.2. What specifically did the Seattle Symphony hope to discover through market research?
- c.3. What tools could your organization use to build a detailed profile of the interests of your target demographic and potential audience?
- c.4. Many of the Seattle Symphony's strategies can be adapted for organizations with smaller budgets. How might an organization conduct market research with different or fewer resources?

## **D THE FINDINGS**

- d.1. What new information did the Seattle Symphony learn about the NUCC demographic? How did that challenge their ideas about programs and programming aimed at this audience?
- d.2. Consider the audience feedback on the Seattle Symphony's programming. In what ways could your organization improve its understanding of feedback from patrons in your target demographic? How could those insights or processes be incorporated into your artistic and marketing plans?

## **E DESIGNING NEW STRATEGIES**

- e.1. What differentiated each of the program series Seattle Symphony developed to attract NUCCs?
- e.2. What did the Seattle Symphony learn from its assumptions about how the "Untuxed" concerts might contribute or detract from other program offerings?
- e.3. What are the differences among your programmatic offerings? What are the reasons for your programmatic distinctions? Are your programmatic differences the result of targeting certain audience groups? How do you feel your organization's existing programs support or destabilize one another?

## **F IMPLEMENTATION**

- f.1. The Seattle Symphony learned that brand distinctions between their programmatic offerings were critical to recruiting new audience members. Why did Seattle Symphony leadership find it important for artistic and marketing staff teams to work together more closely? To what extent should market research drive artistic programming decisions?
- f.2. What challenges does your organization face that prevent collaboration across departments? How could you streamline the collaborative process to encourage the generation and implementation of new ideas?



## ASSESSMENT

- g.1. In what ways did the Seattle Symphony assess whether changes to programming and marketing were yielding the desired results?
- g.2. Besides ticket sales, what are other ways that your organization can determine the level of success of your audience-building initiatives? (Don't be afraid to consider ideas that you haven't tried before, or that might be borrowed from other industries or art forms.)
- g.3. What are Seattle Symphony's next steps in this process? Is the orchestra engaged in continuous learning about its new and existing audiences? Discuss the significance of continuing to evaluate and adjust research tactics and findings as the work proceeds.

### ABOUT THE SEATTLE SYMPHONY

The Seattle Symphony is one of America's leading symphony orchestras and is internationally acclaimed for its innovative programming and extensive recording history. Under the leadership of Music Director Ludovic Morlot since September 2011, the Symphony is heard from September through July by more than 500,000 people through live performances and radio broadcasts. It performs in one of the finest modern concert halls in the world—the acoustically superb Benaroya Hall—in downtown Seattle. Its extensive education and community engagement programs reach over 65,000 children and adults each year. The Seattle Symphony has a deep commitment to new music, commissioning many works by living composers each season. The orchestra has made nearly 150 recordings and has received three Grammy Awards, 23 Grammy nominations, two Emmy Awards, and numerous other accolades. In 2014 the Symphony launched its in-house recording label, Seattle Symphony Media.

### ABOUT THE LEAGUE OF AMERICAN ORCHESTRAS

The League of American Orchestras leads, supports, and champions America's orchestras and the vitality of the music they perform. Its diverse membership

of more than 2,000 organizations and individuals across North America runs the gamut from world-renowned orchestras to community groups, from summer festivals to student and youth ensembles, from conservatories to libraries, from businesses serving orchestras to individuals who love symphonic music. The only national organization dedicated solely to the orchestral experience, the League is a nexus of knowledge and innovation, advocacy, and leadership advancement. Its conferences and events, award-winning Symphony magazine, website, and other publications inform people around the world about orchestral activity and developments. Founded in 1942 and chartered by Congress in 1962, the League links a national network of thousands of instrumentalists, conductors, managers and administrators, board members, volunteers, and business partners. Visit [www.americanorchestras.org](http://www.americanorchestras.org).

### ABOUT BUILDING AUDIENCES FOR SUSTAINABILITY

The Seattle Symphony is one of 25 performing arts organizations participating in The Wallace Foundation's Building Audiences for Sustainability (BAS) effort, a six-year, \$52 million initiative aimed at developing practical insights into how arts organizations can successfully expand their audiences.

The BAS initiative represents a spectrum of dance and opera companies, orchestras, theaters, and multidisciplinary arts institutions. Their projects are designed to reach a variety of diverse audiences, including racial and ethnic groups, age cohorts (primarily young people), and people working in specific sectors. Strategies include commissioning new art that resonates with particular groups, involving target audience members in the creation and selection of works to be performed, creating events that allow audience members to gather and learn more about the art, and staging works in non-traditional venues that are more easily accessible to the target audience.

The evidence gathered from these organizations will be documented and analyzed by an independent team of researchers at the University of Texas, Austin, providing valuable insights, ideas and information for the entire field.

The current initiative draws from lessons learned in the Wallace Excellence Awards. In that 2006-2014 venture, 54 arts organizations in six cities sought to use reliable data and analysis to design and carry out projects to increase the size of their audiences, diversify them, or encourage current audience members to attend more often. The results were promising among the 46 arts groups for which Wallace obtained reliable data; for example, across the 11

organizations that sought to increase the overall size of their audience, the median gain over about three years was 27 percent.

## ABOUT THE WALLACE FOUNDATION

Based in New York City, The Wallace Foundation is an independent national philanthropy dedicated to fostering improvements in learning and enrichment for disadvantaged children and the vitality of the arts for everyone. It seeks to catalyze broad impact by supporting the development, testing, and sharing of new solutions and effective practices. At [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org), the foundation maintains an online library about what it has learned, including knowledge from its current efforts aimed at strengthening education leadership to improve student achievement, helping selected cities make good afterschool programs available to more children, expanding arts learning opportunities for children and teens, providing high-quality summer learning programs to disadvantaged children and enriching and expanding the school day in ways that benefit students, and helping arts organizations build their audiences.

If you are interested in learning more about using market research to better understand your audiences, ***Taking Out the Guesswork: Using Research to Build Arts Audiences*** is a practical guide to conducting market research with low-cost solutions applicable to organizations of all sizes and disciplines. Download the free guide along with other Wallace resources [here](#).

