

Many arts institutions are re-examining their missions and their roles in what has become an increasingly complex arts environment. Concurrently, arts policy appears to be shifting its focus from influencing the supply and quality of the arts to increasing the public access to and experience with the arts.

In this context, it is not surprising that many arts institutions are seeking ways to increase the public's access and exposure to their activities. They seek not only to expand their markets and increase their revenues but to broaden the definition of art and reinvigorate themselves. They face a problem, however, in determining how to go about increasing public participation. Despite their commitment, these institutions often do not have the expertise and resources needed to design and implement effective approaches. As a result, they tend to use hit-or-miss approaches, ending up uncertain about why what they tried did or did not work and thus unable to draw general lessons from their experiences.

The current research literature on arts participation offers these institutions little guidance for their participation-building efforts. This literature has two major drawbacks. First, it oversimplifies the process an individual goes through in deciding to participate in the arts, failing to take into account that the process involves more than one decision and that different factors determine the outcomes of each decision. Arts institutions thus are not provided with enough information to determine what strategies may be appropriate for encouraging the participation of those who constitute their target populations. Second, it emphasizes individuals' socio-demographics rather than their motivations and attitudes, thereby failing to provide the practical guidance institutions need if they are to influence people's participation behavior. An arts institution cannot, after all, influence an individual's background characteristics.

This report is designed to help arts institutions deal with this predicament by offering a framework that they can use to design effective strategies for building involvement in their programs. At the core of this framework is a behavioral model of the decisionmaking process. In addition, the framework provides an

integrative approach for organizations to use when implementing the model, and a set of practical guidelines to apply to this process. Our model is predicated on the assumption that to influence behavior, one must understand how the decisionmaking process actually works. Indeed, a behavioral model must not simply identify factors correlated with a certain behavior, it must specify how those factors operate. Our model attempts to capture the complexity of the decisionmaking process by recognizing that an individual's decision to participate in the arts is really a set of decisions and involves a complex mix of attitudes, intentions, constraints, and behaviors, as well as feedback between that mix and past experience.

Key to our model is the idea that the participation decision is a process divisible into separate stages, each affected by different factors. The *background stage* consists of the individual's general attitudes toward the arts; *stage 1* is the individual's formation of a predisposition to participate in the arts; *stage 2* is his or her evaluation of specific participation opportunities; and *stage 3* is the individual's actual participation experience and subsequent assessment of his or her inclination to participate. Each of these stages is influenced by a different set of factors. What influences the background stage are the individual's *background* characteristics--socio-demographics, personality traits, prior arts experience, and socio-cultural factors. Stage 1 is influenced by *perceptual* factors, such as personal beliefs about the benefits and costs of arts participation and perceptions of how reference groups view the arts; Stage 2 by *practical* factors, such as available information on the arts, the costs involved in participation, and convenience; and stage 3 by the individual's reaction to the actual *experience*.

The model recognizes that the critical issue in designing and implementing effective participation strategies is knowing what the appropriate tactics are and when to use them. The guidance it provides on this issue underscores how important it is for an institution to align its participation goal (to diversify participation—i.e., attract new markets; to broaden participation—i.e., attract new members from existing markets; or to deepen participation—i.e., increase the level of involvement of participants) with its target population (those not disposed to participate, those disposed to participate but not currently doing so, or those already participating) and to focus its tactics on the behavioral levers appropriate for that population. It also provides specific examples of potential tactics.

The model also recognizes that information is critical to the engagement process and must flow back and forth between potential participants and arts organizations. For example, if arts institutions are to design effective engagement strategies, they must know where their target populations are in the decision-making process with regard to arts participation, what motivates their participation, and specifics about their lifestyles and programmatic interests.

Similarly, if potential participants are to make informed choices, they need information about arts organizations and what they have to offer. What information they need will depend on where they are in the decisionmaking process. Those not disposed to participate will need information about the benefits the arts can provide them (i.e., information to convince them that the arts are worth their participation), whereas those disposed to participate but not currently doing so will need information telling them what activities are offered, when and where, and at what price. Those already involved with the arts will benefit from information that increases their understanding and knowledge of the arts.

Our approach recognizes that in designing and implementing their engagement strategies, arts institutions must also be mindful of their resource constraints and other institutional goals. Indeed, failure to consider their broader institutional and community contexts can create conflicts within the organization and make setting priorities and goals very difficult. Thus, our framework suggests that institutions must determine how participation building efforts fit with their overall purpose and mission, their available resources, and the community environment in which they operate. In other words, arts organizations must take an integrative approach to building participation, one that

- Links the organization's participation-building activities to its core values and purpose through goals chosen to support that purpose.
- Identifies clear target groups and bases its tactics on good information about those groups.
- Clearly understands both the internal and external resources that can be committed to building participation.
- Establishes a process for feedback and self-evaluation.

Although we believe that arts organizations should tailor the strategies and tactics they use to build participation to their specific target populations and institutional contexts, our framework offers a set of guidelines to help institutions approach the task of participation building. These guidelines provide suggestions as to how institutions should approach the process as a whole as well as each of its central elements.