

## Summary of Findings from the Review of Literature on Audience Building

While many relevant publications exist, there is not a distinct line of inquiry about audience-building efforts among performing arts organizations whose authors cite one another and build on each other's work, or even necessarily address similar questions. Major points from our review of this wide array of literature include:

- Attendance at multiple performing arts forms has declined, but less is known about the reasons for these declines. The literature offers suggestive links for some of these drivers but raises doubts about others.
- The literature proposes a wide array of audience-building techniques, but is inconclusive with respect to their results. One problem is that the empirical support presented is often slim. To expand the empirical base of support, we need more studies that collect outcomes data, follow audience-building efforts over time, and use larger samples to determine what audience-building approaches are more or less likely to achieve intended results under different circumstances and to determine which are sustainable over the long term. We also need studies about the costs and benefits (both financial and mission-related) of implementing different audience-building strategies.
- A widespread theme in the literature is that audiences do not attend solely, or even primarily, for the art presented, but for an *arts experience*, and that arts organizations are not currently responsive to this desire. Answers vary, however, as to what experiences audiences seek and how organizations could provide these.
- The literature suggests that audience building is not an isolated endeavor, but is related to other aspects of organizational culture and operations. Additional research is needed on the organizational conditions for successful audience-building activities, and audience-building research would benefit from forging more bridges with the general literature on organizational learning and change.
- One subtheme in the literature is that neither audiences nor the world of arts organizations are monolithic. This implies that different audience-building approaches may be better suited to engaging different audiences and may serve different goals, and that organizations may need to make tradeoffs in their audience-building efforts. One intriguing observation that bears further research is Wiggins's (2004) contention that audience-building efforts aimed at attracting one target audience may deter attendance by other audiences. This implies that organizations (and research on them) need to consider the unintended consequences of audience-building projects.
- An underexplored question is the extent to which audience declines are a response to *what* arts organizations are presenting (the art forms), versus *how* arts organizations present the art or other organizational characteristics.