

October 1, 2014

**The Wallace Foundation's New Arts Initiative**  
**Building Audiences for Sustainability**  
**FAQ**

**ABOUT THE INITIATIVE**

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**Q: What is The Wallace Foundation's Building Audiences for Sustainability initiative?**

**A:** This six-year, \$40-million arts initiative is designed to help about 25 outstanding performing arts organizations across the United States develop approaches to attract new audiences *and* retain existing ones while benefitting the broader field through knowledge developed from their efforts. The initiative will seek to determine whether and how the efforts of a small set of exemplary organizations result in net gains in new and current audiences while contributing to their overall financial health. The initiative consists of two related parts:

- *Structured grants to arts organizations:* Direct support to performing arts organizations in planning and executing their audience-building strategies and artistic programming toward a long-term goal of strengthening those organizations.
- *Building and sharing new knowledge:* A Wallace-commissioned independent study of the participating arts organizations' efforts to produce a series of public reports and guides.

**Q: What is the goal of this new initiative?**

**A:** Building on the success of earlier Wallace arts efforts, **Building Audiences for Sustainability** has two goals. It aims to provide significant multi-year support to exemplary arts organizations whose artistic vision and mission involve the engagement of new audiences. It also seeks to understand and share useful evidence and practical ideas from these organizations on whether and how they can achieve and sustain audience gains and whether these gains improve their overall financial health. In this way, the initiative aims both to strengthen the organizations and to generate knowledge to benefit the broader field.

**Q: How does the initiative work?**

**A:** Over a period of four years (2015–2019), the selected organizations will design and carry out audience-building projects that focus on their artistic programming. Projects may range from developing new works of art, to presenting art in new ways or different venues, to supporting engagement activities such as the use of social media to interact with potential new audiences. Each organization will complete at least two cycles of work (a cycle may or may not correspond with a season), with the second cycle incorporating what it has learned from the first cycle. We will also provide assistance in market research so organizations can develop a clear understanding of the impact of their projects on existing and prospective audiences, as well as in

organizational development so they can ensure that all staff and departments work together effectively on the projects.

Over a period of six years (2015–2021), the arts organizations’ funded work will be the basis for developing new knowledge about how audience-building can be both effective and sustainable. We will commission a series of independent public reports drawing on the experience of and evidence generated by the participating arts organizations, and building on the insights shared in reports from earlier Wallace initiatives. The goal is to help all arts organizations strengthen their own efforts.

**Q: How will the success of the programs be measured?**

**A:** The primary measure of success will be a net growth in the organizations’ audience size through new attendees returning and sufficient numbers of current audiences continuing their engagement. A secondary measure will be the financial contribution of audience-building efforts to the organization. We will provide funding for organizations to retain market research consultants that will help track and measure gains in the specific areas of audience engagement that they are targeting. These data will be sources for the Wallace-commissioned independent study that will look across all organizations participating in the initiative.

**Q: How will Wallace share the findings from the new initiative?**

**A:** To ensure that we benefit the broader field through insights gained from this initiative, Wallace will make public on [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org) the reports we commission about the progress and the practical strategies developed by the participating organizations – adding to the numerous knowledge products already posted. In addition to publishing and disseminating these reports, we have formed partnerships with arts service organizations to share the new knowledge with their members through their publications, presentations, newsletters, and other communications channels.

The arts service organizations are: American Alliance of Museums, Association of Performing Arts Presenters, Chamber Music America, Dance USA, League of American Orchestras, Opera America, and Theatre Communications Group, all of which have been actively pursuing audience-building agendas.

In addition, we are working with the Association of Arts Administration Educators to make this knowledge available for use in graduate and undergraduate programs that prepare future arts leaders.

**ABOUT THE GRANTS**

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**Q: Can any arts organization apply for a grant?**

**A:** No. Wallace will issue requests for proposals for the **Building Audiences for Sustainability** initiative to a group of performing arts organizations identified through a national nomination process. Across all our work, we typically fund selected organizations to test promising new ideas, to conduct independent research about their efforts, and to share what we learn. The idea is to benefit both the limited number of organizations Wallace has the resources to support directly as well as the many other organizations that are interested in pursuing similar changes but that may never receive our direct funding. We believe this approach strengthens the effectiveness of our funding, but it also means that the foundation rarely funds unsolicited proposals.

**Q: How do you identify prospective grant recipients?**

**A:** For the new **Building Audiences for Sustainability** initiative, a team of independent consultants interviewed about 75 arts leaders with varied perspectives who nominated more than 300 performing arts organizations. From that list, based on a mix of geography, size, discipline and – most importantly – audience goals, we identified approximately 80 prospective grantees to receive requests for proposals. The RFPs will be

sent to these organizations by mid-October 2014; they will have one month to complete their proposals. We expect that about 25 organizations will be selected and announced in February 2015.

**Q: What are the criteria for selection to receive the request for proposals?**

**A:** Organizations invited to submit a proposal are drawn from dance, music (including opera, orchestra, and small ensembles), theater, and performing arts presenters. The selection criteria include recognition for artistic excellence, a focus on the work of professional artists, an annual budget of about \$1.5 million or more, a recent record of interesting efforts in audience-building with room to learn more, and the ability to engage in a multi-year initiative.

**Q: What are the criteria for awarding the grants?**

**A:** We seek to build a diverse portfolio across the roughly 25 participating arts organizations to simultaneously support their artistic vision and to yield a set of rich insights and experiences based on a sizeable sample of comparable organizations to share knowledge with the field. Our goal of benefitting many more organizations than we have the resources to fund directly will affect the selection of the grantees. For example, perhaps the majority of proposals received will outline projects to broaden (or expand) audiences, with fewer potentially seeking to diversify (or bring in new) audiences. In that case, the “broadening” proposals will face more competition for inclusion in the final portfolio than the “diversifying” ones. Our selection may not, therefore, be an exact reflection of the pool of proposals received, but a balanced mix across artistic discipline, geography, and audience-building goals.

**Q: What role do the arts service organizations play in the process? Did they help select the applicants or organizations being considered to receive grants?**

**A:** The arts service organizations (ASOs) – American Alliance of Museums, Association of Performing Arts Presenters, Chamber Music America, Dance USA, League of American Orchestras, Opera America, and Theatre Communications Group – were among the list of 75 nominators who helped Wallace identify the pool of potential applicants. They are not, however, involved in selecting the organizations to receive a request for proposal (RFP) or grant. Later in the initiative, the ASOs will play an important and ongoing role in disseminating the knowledge created so that the entire arts field can apply what is learned to their own audience-building practices.

**Q: How large will each grant be?**

**A:** Performing arts organizations will be invited to apply for up to \$1.25 million over four years to cover artistic programming and assistance in such areas as market research and organizational development to strengthen internal processes, with modest additional support to help with data collection for the final two years of the initiative.

**Q: How many organizations will receive grants?**

**A:** We expect to be able to award grants to about 25 performing arts organizations.

**Q: When will the grants be awarded?**

**A:** The organizations will be selected and announced in February 2015.

**Q: Why are only performing arts organizations included? Will art museums be considered in the future?**

**A:** Because museums face different challenges and opportunities in building audiences, we are not including them at this time. Museums operate in a fundamentally different way from performing arts organizations; most audiences for performances arrive at a specific hour for a given length of time, for example, while museum visitors can come at any time and stay for any length of time. Nonetheless, we aim to keep building a knowledge base of effective practices for all arts organizations. While we have no current plans for another initiative focused on art museums, we do not rule out this possibility in the future.

**THE WALLACE FOUNDATION’S COMMITMENT TO THE ARTS**

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**Q: Does this initiative signify a long-term commitment from Wallace to arts funding, or is it a one-time opportunity?**

**A:** Supporting the arts is integral to our mission of fostering improvements in the vitality of the arts for everyone. Our commitment to the arts, therefore, will remain central to our work for the conceivable future.

**Q: How does the new arts initiative relate to The Wallace Foundation’s previous arts funding initiatives?**

**A:** The new initiative builds on Wallace’s experiences and knowledge developed over the past 15 years with our partners, including the following Wallace-commissioned publications and the Wallace Excellence Awards, our most recent initiative in the arts:

***The Wallace Excellence Awards (WEA)***

This initiative provided grants of up to \$750,000 to 54 arts organizations in six cities to carry out audience-building efforts, using market research and data to design, evaluate, and improve their programs. The results, based on the experiences of the 46 arts groups for which Wallace obtained reliable data, were very promising. Across the 11 organizations that sought to increase the overall size of their audience, the median gain was 27 percent over approximately three years. Across the 35 organizations seeking to increase the size of a particular audience segment, such as teens or families, the median gain was 60 percent over approximately three years.

***The Road to Results: Effective Practices for Building Arts Audiences***

Written by Bob Harlow, an expert in market research, and released in conjunction with the announcement of this initiative, this report shares the strategies and practices of 10 of the WEA recipients. While the organizations are diverse across art form, geography, and size, consistent among them are nine practices of success. *The Road to Results* shares those practices with real-life examples drawn from the organizations, and highlights the organizations' successes and failures in order to encourage and help others adopt evidence-based practices for effective audience-building work.

***Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate About the Benefits of the Arts***

This acclaimed 2005 RAND report describes “intrinsic” benefits of the arts – such as opening people to new perspectives – as well as “instrumental” benefits, such as economic development. It concludes that the broader social benefits stem from people’s individual, rewarding encounters with art and that arts organizations need to find ways to introduce more people to those experiences.

***A New Framework for Building Participation in the Arts***

This landmark RAND study from 2001 offers arts organizations ways to avoid hit-or-miss efforts at audience-building that waste scarce resources. It suggests that building arts participation refers to one or more of three activities: “broadening” audiences (increasing their size), “deepening” them (enriching the experience of current participants and increasing their participation), or “diversifying” them (bringing new groups into the fold). Once goals are set, the organization can identify a target population, gather data about the target population, and develop strategies and tactics appropriate to the target population and aligned with its mission.

The RAND *Framework* also explains that successful audience-building efforts require the sustained and coordinated commitment of an organization's key staff and operating units, its board, and key funders. This requires an organization to articulate a clear set of audience goals that serve its mission and purpose and for which it can build internal consensus. Without this link, audience-building activities may be perceived as serving multiple and conflicting purposes or, even worse, as marginal to the organization's real work. This systematic, integrated approach is a key feature in the new **Building Audiences for Sustainability** initiative.

**Q. What is Wallace's mission?**

**A.** Our mission is to foster improvements in learning and enrichment for disadvantaged children, and the vitality of the arts for everyone. We seek to catalyze broad impact by supporting the development, testing, and sharing of new solutions and effective practices.