

# EMBARGOED UNTIL OCTOBER 1, 2014

## **The Wallace Foundation Announces Six-Year, \$40-Million Initiative to Support – and Learn From – Up to 24 Performing Arts Organizations That Engage New Audiences**

***Wallace also releases new guide on nine effective audience-building practices***

NEW YORK, October 1, 2014 – The Wallace Foundation announced today a six-year, \$40-million arts initiative, **Building Audiences for Sustainability**, designed to help up to 24 outstanding performing arts organizations across the United States create programs that attract new audiences while retaining existing ones.

Building on the success of earlier Wallace arts efforts, the new initiative aims to provide meaningful support to arts organizations whose artistic vision and mission involve building audiences. The foundation also seeks to understand and share evidence and experience 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.

The foundation also released ***The Road to Results: Effective Practices for Building Arts Audiences***, which identifies and explains nine actions that arts organizations can take to increase the chances they will succeed in engaging audiences. These nine practices were identified in an analysis of the audience-building efforts of 10 arts organizations that took part in an earlier Wallace initiative, the Wallace Excellence Awards. Both *The Road to Results*, written by Bob Harlow, an expert in market research, and case studies examining four of the 10 projects are available at the foundation's [Knowledge Center](#).

“The Wallace Foundation has been committed to the arts since its inception, reflecting the belief of our co-founder Lila Acheson Wallace that ‘the arts belong to everyone,’” said Will Miller, president of The Wallace Foundation. “We see helping arts organizations find ways to thrive, not simply survive, as an important part of our mission. This new effort will not only support the plans of up to 24 great arts organizations to expand and diversify their audiences, it will also provide new insights and knowledge that we hope will be useful to the entire field.”

Miller will formally announce the new initiative via a live stream from New York Public Radio's Jerome L. Greene Performance Space at 3:00 p.m. Eastern Time. His remarks will be followed by a panel discussion on audience building with Jane Chu, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts; Robert Battle, artistic director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater; Kelly Tweeddale, executive director of the Seattle Opera; and James Houghton, founding artistic director of the Signature Theatre Company. The discussion will be moderated by Kurt Andersen, novelist and host of the Peabody Award-winning public radio program Studio 360. This one-hour conversation is available to view on the Wallace [ThrivingArts.org](#) website.

NEA Chairman Chu said, “The arts are an essential part of our society, and we need to find ways to work together to bring in new and younger audiences so that we can all experience their transformative power. The Wallace Foundation has developed an innovative approach to providing support to a number of arts organizations in a way that will benefit the entire field by sharing what the foundation and its partner arts organizations learn through this funded effort.”

The new Wallace initiative grows out of the information and insights developed during the Wallace Excellence Awards (WEA) initiative, a multi-year effort, concluded in 2014, that supported audience-building projects in 54 visual and performing arts organizations in six cities around the country: Boston, Chicago, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Philadelphia, San Francisco and Seattle. WEA recipients included The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (Boston), Chicago’s Steppenwolf Theatre Company and Seattle’s Pacific Northwest Ballet. Across the 46 WEA recipients that provided reliable data, the results were promising. Over a period that averaged three years, the organizations seeking an increase in the size of their overall audience saw median gains of 27 percent, while those targeting growth of a specific segment saw median gains of 60 percent.

WEA recipients based their audience-building practices on ideas laid out in the 2001 Wallace-commissioned RAND report [\*A New Framework for Building Participation in the Arts\*](#). This seminal report suggests that building arts audiences refers to one or more of three activities: “broadening” audiences (increasing an audience size by bringing in people who are already inclined to enjoy the art form but are not current audience members); “deepening” (having current audience members attend more often); or “diversifying” (engaging new groups). It also identifies ways arts organizations can build audiences while avoiding hit-or-miss efforts that waste scarce resources. The approach stresses that audience-building work must be tightly aligned with an arts organization’s mission, resources and operations, and that the work needs to be continuously studied and refined.

The **Building Audiences for Sustainability** initiative will provide funding to up to 24 exemplary organizations – in dance, music, opera and theater, as well as multi-disciplinary performing arts presenters – to carry out audience-engagement efforts in line with the RAND *New Framework* and *The Road to Results*. Over a period of four years, they will design and implement audience-building projects driven by their artistic vision and mission, ranging from developing new programming to presenting performances in novel ways or at nontraditional venues.

The arts organizations will develop and carry out an initial audience-building project, assess its effectiveness, then use what they have learned to shape and implement a second project or projects. In addition, they will work on sustaining any audience gains made as a result of their efforts.

Participating organizations will be selected and announced in February 2015.

In addition to receiving grant support for their artistic efforts, participating organizations will receive assistance in research and data collection (to help them develop a clear understanding of the impact of their programs on existing and prospective audiences) and organizational development.

To ensure that the efforts of the selected arts organizations help inform and strengthen field practice, the foundation will commission an independent, \$3.5-million study. It will examine the progress, day-to-day operational lessons and overall effectiveness of the artistic programming and audience-building work undertaken by the organizations. The study will assess whether the organizations have made audience gains, whether these gains are sustained and how the gains contribute to the organization’s financial health. The study’s findings will result in a series of public reports, which will be released over the course of the initiative, beginning in 2016.

In addition, Wallace has formed partnerships with seven arts service organizations to provide the field with findings from the initiative through their publications, presentations, newsletters and other communications. The organizations – Opera America, Association of Performing Arts Presenters, American Alliance of Museums, League of American Orchestras, Dance USA, Theatre Communications Group and Chamber Music America – have been actively pursuing audience-building issues.

Daniel Windham, the foundation’s director of arts, remarked, “We hope this initiative will shed light on approaches to building audiences that are sustainable. Sharing our findings is at the core of all Wallace initiatives, and the insights we will gather from this important work aim to help performing arts organizations across the country have more and better information about what works, what doesn’t and why.”

# # #

### **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 to build their audiences.*

### **Press contacts**

#### **Resnicow Schroeder Associates**

Sara Griffin: 212-671-5169, [sgriffin@resnicowschroeder.com](mailto:sgriffin@resnicowschroeder.com)

Anne Wilson: 212-671-5163, [awilson@resnicowschroeder.com](mailto:awilson@resnicowschroeder.com)

Maria May: 212-207-6082, [mmay@resnicowschroeder.com](mailto:mmay@resnicowschroeder.com)

#### **The Wallace Foundation**

Jessica Schwartz: 212-251-9711, [jschwartz@wallacefoundation.org](mailto:jschwartz@wallacefoundation.org)