

October 1, 2014

The Wallace Foundation in the Arts Fact Sheet

About The Wallace Foundation:

Based in New York City, The Wallace Foundation is a national philanthropy dedicated to fostering improvements in learning and enrichment for disadvantaged children, and the vitality of the arts for everyone. The foundation, with assets of approximately \$1.5 billion, traces its origins back more than a half century to DeWitt and Lila Acheson Wallace, the founders of The Reader's Digest Association. During their lifetimes, the Wallaces contributed to a wide assortment of artistic, cultural, and youth-serving causes. In 2003, a collection of small family foundations that were the philanthropic legacy of DeWitt and Lila Wallace were consolidated into The Wallace Foundation, which primarily focuses on education, afterschool, and the arts. The Foundation seeks to catalyze broad impact by supporting the development, testing, and sharing of new solutions and effective practices.

History of Arts Funding:

The Wallace Foundation's commitment to the arts evolved from co-founder Lila Wallace's conviction that "the arts belong to everyone." Since 1990, the Foundation has made grants of \$460 million to hundreds of programs in the arts, especially in the creative disciplines surveyed regularly by the National Endowment for the Arts: classical music, jazz, the visual arts, opera, theater and dance. In the last decade, Wallace has focused on two major areas: education (working with nonprofits and school districts to engage more young people in high-quality arts learning) and audience-building (helping exemplary arts organizations expand or diversify their audiences). Most recently in the arts, Wallace has supported organizations' audience-building efforts through its Wallace Excellence Awards (WEA) and will continue to do so through its new **Building Audiences for Sustainability** initiative.

Over the past 15 years, Wallace has produced a number of publications on the importance of audience engagement to the overall success of arts organizations:

- RAND's [*A New Framework for Building Participation in the Arts*](#) (2001) offers arts organizations a way to avoid hit-and-miss efforts at audience-building that waste scarce resources.
- Urban Institute's [*Arts and Culture: Community Connections*](#) (2002) offers suggestions on using community links as a means of building audiences.
- RAND's [*Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate About the Benefits of the Arts*](#) (2005) describes intrinsic benefits of the arts – such as opening people to new perspectives – as well as secondary benefits, such as economic development.
- The Curb Center at Vanderbilt University's [*Engaging Art: The Next Great Transformation of American's Cultural Life*](#) (2008) analyzes trends involving technology, audience demographics, and the rise of participatory culture.
- RAND's [*Cultivating Demand for the Arts: Arts Learning, Arts Engagement, and State Arts Policy*](#) (2008) argues that reversing declining participation in the arts will require more and better arts

education because those who experience the arts as children are more likely to seek out arts experiences as adults.

- A [Wallace Arts Update](#) (2014) summarizes findings from this body of work, related studies and the experiences of Wallace-funded arts organizations.

About the Wallace Excellence Awards (WEA) Initiative:

Created to help exemplary arts organizations reach more and different kinds of people, the Wallace Excellence Award (WEA) initiative (in two phases: 2003–2005 and 2006–2014) was designed to generate broadly applicable lessons and practices that would be helpful to the entire field. The novel approaches to audience-building tested by these organizations ranged from new kinds of programming to new methods of reaching prospective audiences. The foundation has released case study evaluations of four of the WEA participants, with six more to follow in the coming months. A related publication, [The Road to Results: Effective Practices for Building Arts Audiences](#), which outlines nine practices for audience-building distilled from the WEA case studies, was released October 2014 and is available on the foundation’s website. A guide for arts organizations on how to undertake market research will be released in 2015.

In addition to direct funding, Wallace provided each organization with assistance to help them measure the results of their work. The results were promising for the 46 arts groups for which Wallace obtained reliable data. Across the 11 organizations that sought to increase the overall size of their audience, the median gain was 27 percent over an average of 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 an average of three years. (The size of an audience segment is, of course, smaller than the size of a whole audience, making larger percentage gains easier. Also, some organizations pursued specific audience segments for the first time, meaning that they were starting from a very small base. Still, it’s clear that organizations made meaningful progress in building their audiences.)

About the Building Audiences for Sustainability Initiative:

Building Audiences for Sustainability is a six-year, \$40-million effort that will build on the lessons learned from WEA. While WEA participants focused on attracting more and different kinds of people, organizations selected for the new initiative will attempt to attract new audiences while at the same time retaining their current audiences. They will also work on strategies to keep new audiences coming back over the long term and examine whether or not their audience-building work contributes to their financial health.

Under this new initiative, about 25 outstanding performing arts organizations for which audience-building is an integral part of their artistic mission will receive multi-year grants and technical support from Wallace to conduct audience-building efforts modeled on RAND’s *New Framework*. The *Framework* calls for such efforts to be closely aligned with both artistic vision and day-to-day operations. Over a period of four years, the organizations will design and carry out audience-building projects that focus on artistic programming; projects may range from developing new programming to offering performances in novel ways or in alternate venues. Each organization will complete at least two projects, with the second cycle of work incorporating lessons learned from the first cycle. Wallace will provide assistance in market research so organizations can develop a clear understanding of existing and prospective audiences and the impact of their projects on them, as well as in organizational development so they can ensure that all staff and departments work together effectively on the projects.

Reflecting Wallace’s approach to philanthropy, the arts organizations’ funded work will be the basis for developing new knowledge about how audience-building can be both effective and sustainable. Independent researchers will produce a series of public reports that will draw on the experience and evidence generated by the participating arts organizations and build on the insights shared in the WEA case studies and *The Road to Results* – with the goal of helping all arts organizations strengthen their own efforts.

The initiative begins in spring of 2015 with funding to the arts organizations and lasts for four years, with two additional years of evaluation, culminating in 2020.