

*Audience Engagement:
Working Toward A New
Vision*

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Dance/USA 2009 Annual Conference

 **ENGAGE**



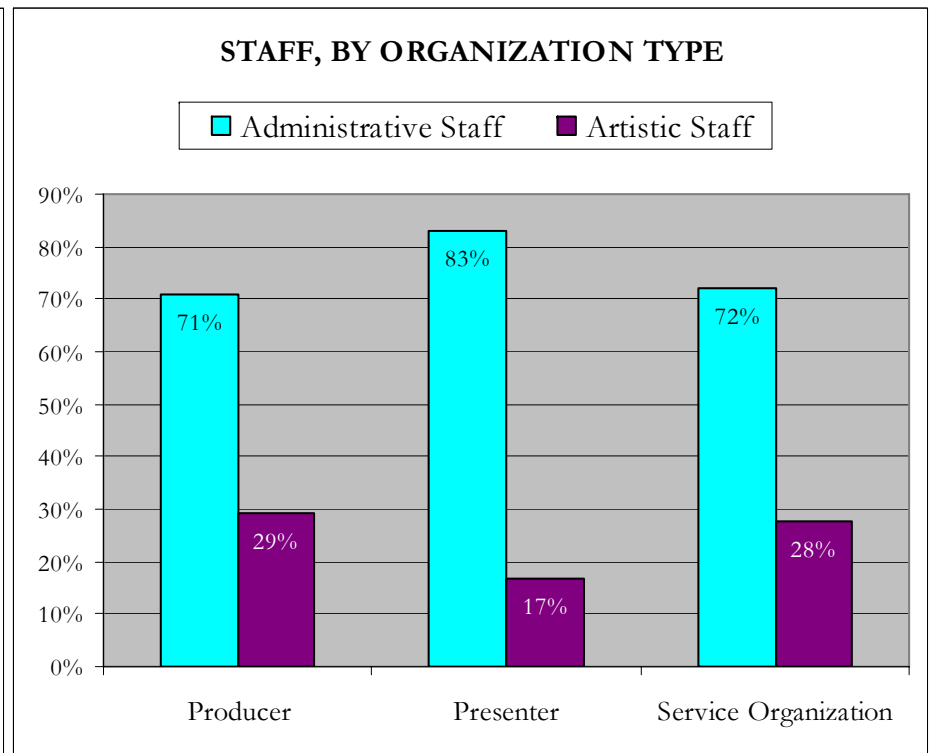
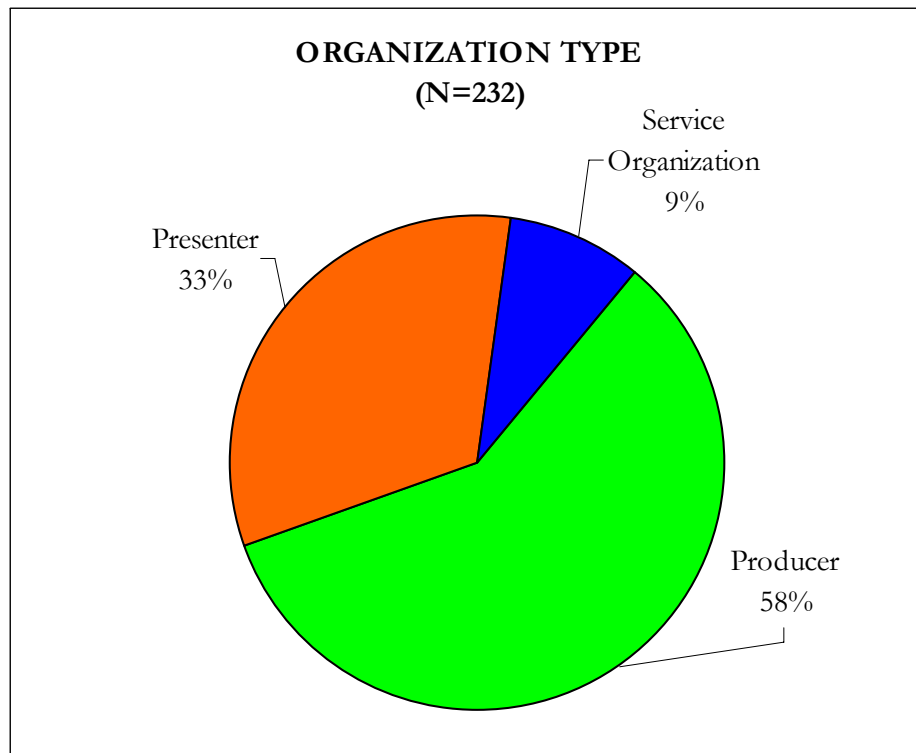
Our Role in Engaging Dance Audiences (EDA)

- Research current audience engagement practices
- Work with grantees to survey their audiences to assess the effectiveness of engagement programs
- Co-facilitate EDA learning community
- Research how audiences want to engage with the art form

Survey of Current Audience Engagement Practices

- Survey inquired about:
 - Types of engagement activities
 - Planning, responsibility & evaluation
 - Perspectives on “audience engagement”
- Survey was open to Dance/USA members and non-members
 - 96% of respondents were Dance/USA Members
 - Required as part of Idea Submission for *EDA* grant
- 64% of Dance/USA’s organization-members completed the survey
 - Total Responses received = 232
- Positivity bias

Survey Respondents





Current Engagement Activities



Leading Up to Performances

	Total
Lecture/discussion with artist	79%
Master classes	74%
Open rehearsal	70%
Provide other opportunities for online social networking, such as Facebook, Twitter, or photo sharing	69%
Artist demonstration	67%
Create web/online information resource about artists/performance (beyond promotional language)	63%
Provide links to digital video files of artists' work	62%
Lecture/discussion with a dance expert, but not the artist	58%
Provide other opportunities for live social networking such as pre-show receptions or light meals, discussion groups, or "clubs"	52%
Introductory dance classes	45%
Mail artist or performance information to ticket-holders and/or potential audiences (beyond promotional language)	39%
Offer a blog created and populated by the artist about the choreography to be presented	21%
Online dialogue to contribute to the creative process, participate in performances or show up for gatherings (such as flash mobs)	13%

- Most pre-performance engagement activities are about listening and watching, or self-guided information acquisition.



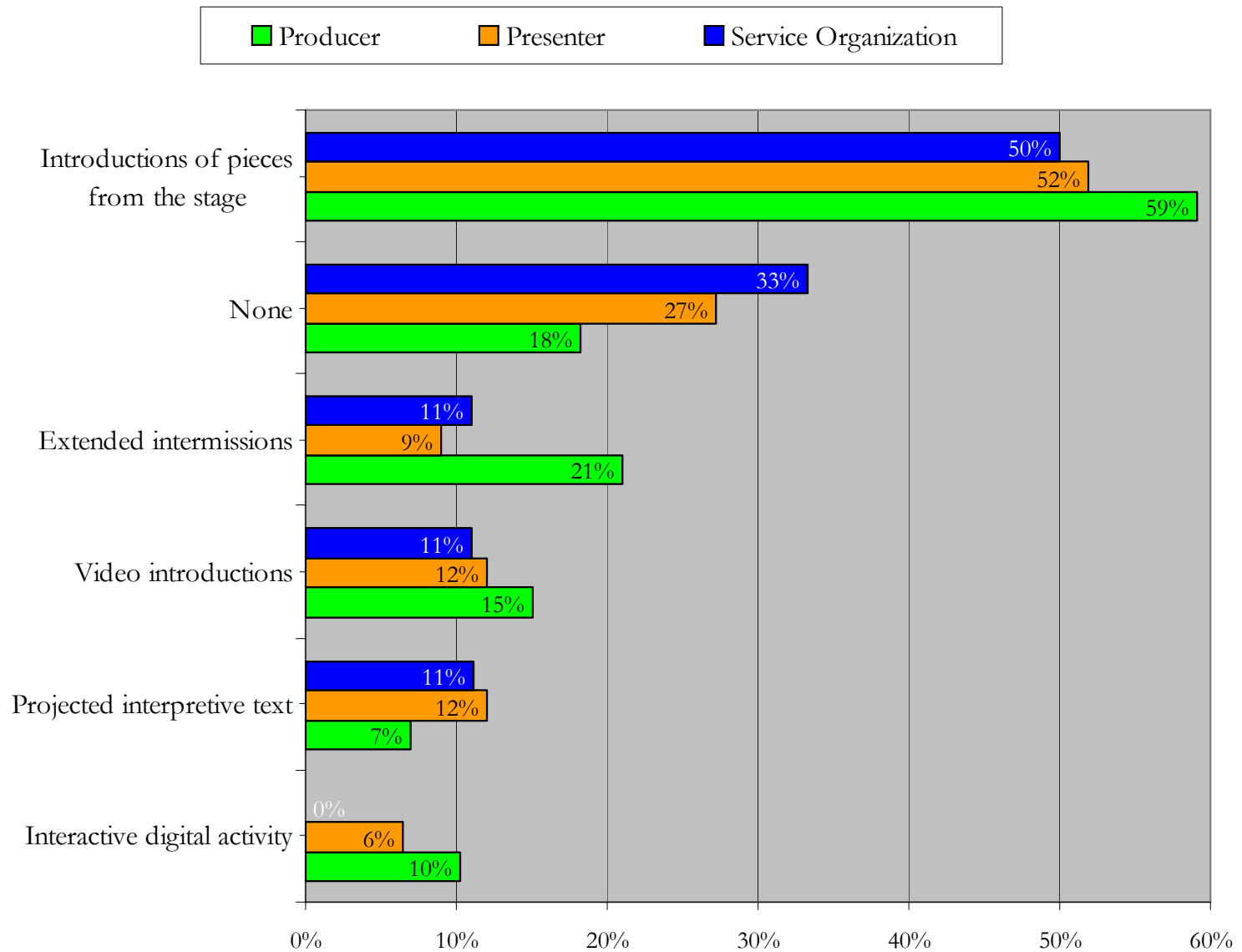
During the Performance

	Total
Introductions of pieces from the stage by an artist or educator	56%
My organization does not do engagement activities during performances	22%
Extended intermissions to encourage dialogue	16%
Video introductions of pieces shown immediately prior to performances (not live)	13%
Interpretive text projected onto a screen during performances (like super-titles)	9%
Interactive digital activity during performances	8%

- Aside from spoken introductions from the stage, not a lot of engagement activities take place during performances.



ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES DURING THE PERFORMANCE, BY ORGANIZATION TYPE





After the Performance

	Total
Post-performance discussions with artists	76%
Provide spaces or facilitators for informal gathering and conversation after performances	54%
Provide other opportunities for online social networking, such as a blog, exchange on Facebook, or photo sharing	44%
Post-performance discussion with professional facilitators	41%
Provide other opportunities for live social networking, such as dinners, discussion groups, or "clubs"	33%
Post-performance discussion with professional dance writers or critics	24%
Invite audience members to react to the performance in an online forum or blog	22%
Email audience members after performances with information or links to educational resources	13%
Distribute questions that audience members can ask each other	6%

Most post-performance activities are “in-person” discussions - facilitated or not - although some online opportunities are provided.



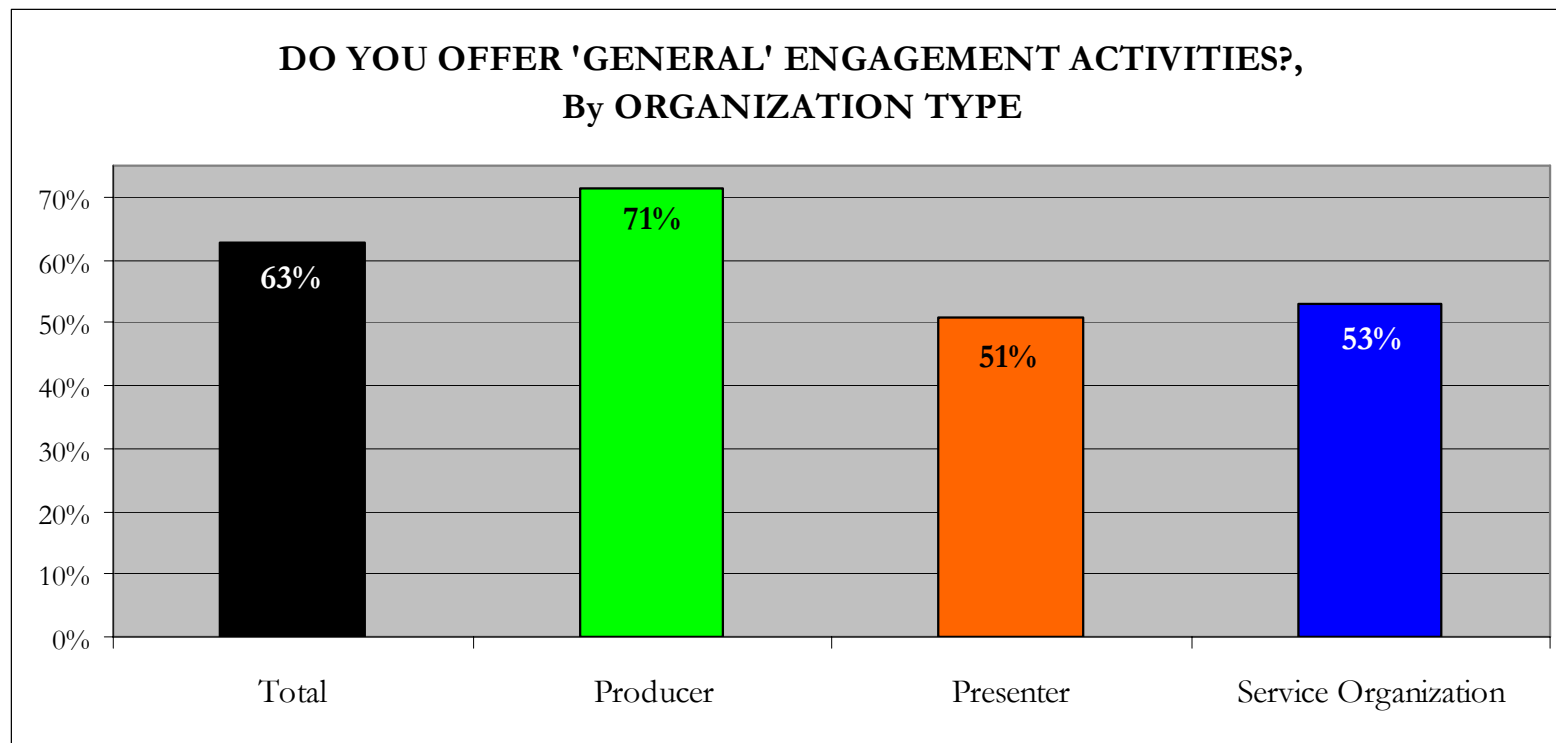
Planning for Engagement Activities

Who is primarily responsible for designing engagement activities?

	Total
Artistic Leadership	57%
Executive Director/Administrative Leadership	44%
Marketing staff	27%
Education staff	26%
No delineation between staff roles	23%
Outreach staff	22%
Development/Membership staff	20%
Volunteers, students, or interns	11%

- Multiple responses were allowed.
- In most organizations, two or three people are responsible for designing engagement activities.

'General' Engagement Activities (i.e., not associated with a specific performance)



- What sorts of general engagement activities do you offer?



Barriers

	Total
Lack of time to plan or staff to run	71%
Cost	69%
Low participation by audiences	32%
Lack of technology know-how or software	31%
Artist availability or lack of interest	28%
Lack of physical space	26%
Question about whether or not they will work	22%
Lack of support from institutional leadership	9%
Lack of support from decision makers, such as board or staff leadership	9%
Agents or artist management resistance	8%
Lack of new ideas	7%

- Lack of resources is the primary barrier to doing more engagement activities.

History of Evaluating Engagement Programs

- 64% have evaluated or assessed the effectiveness of their engagement activities
- Their approaches to evaluation have included:

	Total (n=140)
Staff debriefings of engagement events/programs	85%
Participant satisfaction surveys	65%
Collected and/or published anecdotes about participant experiences	56%
Focus group discussions with participants	27%
Online survey, blog, listserv, or exchange	25%
Expert observation or quality assessment	21%



Perspectives on 'Audience Engagement'

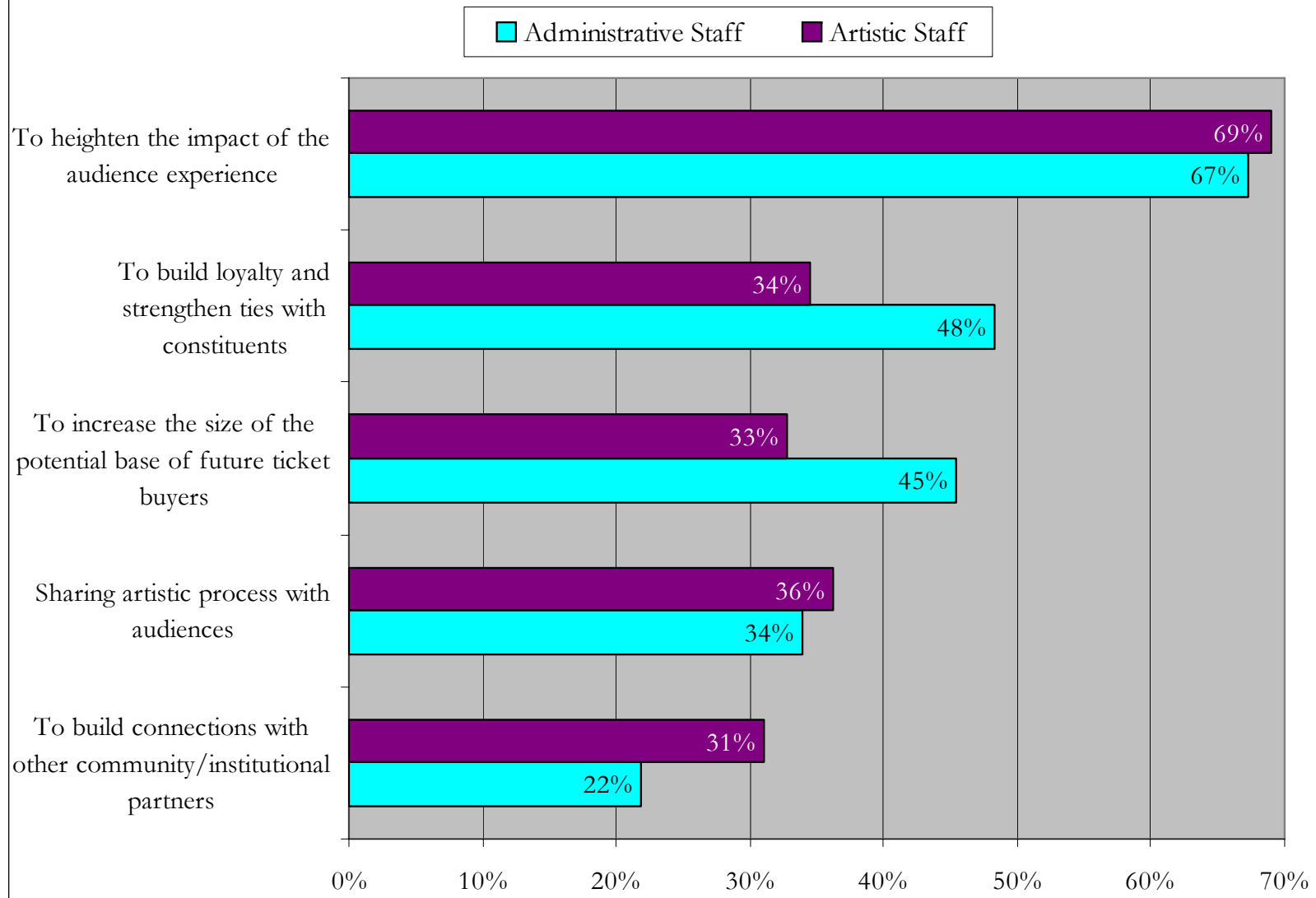
Most Important Outcomes of Audience Engagement

	Total
To heighten the impact of the audience experience	68%
To build loyalty and strengthen ties with constituents	45%
To increase the size of the potential base of future ticket buyers	42%
Sharing artistic process with audiences	34%
To provide disadvantaged constituents with opportunities they would not otherwise have	29%
To build connections with other community/institutional partners	24%
To help audiences develop capacity for critical response	22%
To cultivate donors for more/larger gifts	10%

- Primarily, engagement activities are undertaken to heighten impact, although marketing outcomes are also desired.



WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT OUTCOMES OF AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS?, BY STAFF





Perspectives

Do you think the primary responsibility for audience engagement lies with...	Total
...the presenter/producer reaching out to audiences	96%
...the audience member seeking out a richer experience	4%
100%	

Do you think 'audience engagement' is...	Total
...a broad term referring to the numerous ways that organizations reach out to current and potential audiences	90%
...a specific term referring to how an organization interacts with its audiences	10%
100%	

Do you think 'audience engagement' activities serve mostly to...	Total
... 'deepen' audiences' experiences with the art form	90%
... 'broaden' the audience for dance	10%
100%	



'Audience Engagement' & 'Audience Development'



Is there a distinction between 'audience engagement' & 'audience development'?

- 72% reported 'Yes'
 - 13% reported 'Unsure'
 - 15% reported 'No'
- Explanations for their responses:

	Total (n=181)
Audience development is about broadening/increasing audiences; audience engagement is about deepening the experience for audiences.	59%
Distinct, but intertwined	10%
Interchangeable	8%
Engagement is a subset of development; a way to development audiences	6%
Audience development is about deepening audiences' experiences; engagement is about increasing audiences	3%
Audience development is about deepening audiences' experiences; engagement is about keeping audiences	2%



Is there a distinction between 'audience engagement' & 'audience development'?

- “Audience development can be measured quantitatively; audience engagement can be measured qualitatively.”
- “Audience development is focused mainly on filling seats; audience engagement is more about filling souls.”



Have you seen any changes in how artists and managers think about audience engagement activities?

- 81% reported 'Yes'
- Explanations for their responses:

	Total (n=178)
A new awareness, a new openness to engagement activities	52%
The spread of technology has enabled an expansion of engagement activities	21%
Artists are more comfortable with engagement, and have a greater understanding of its importance	15%
Artists and managers are open to engagement activities, but implementation is a challenge	10%
Opportunities for funding largely drive the interest in audience engagement activities	8%



Have you seen any changes in how artists and managers think about audience engagement activities?

- “Yes, and I am skeptical of the intent and authenticity of these changes. I think that it is trendy to do more outreach; trendy in that it is funder- and field-driven. I am not sure how many in the national community are really investing themselves and their organizations in this work and realizing the impact. It is a tremendous investment and long-term relationship. Master-classes and additional activities alone will not succeed.”

Are you seeing any trends in audience response to your engagement programs?

- 73% reported 'Yes'
- Explanations for their responses:

	Total (n=167)
Audiences have a greater understanding and/or appreciation for our work	22%
Audiences love the activities and want more	21%
Our audiences are more involved, participate more because we offer these activities.	20%
We see increased attendance/interest in our engagement activities	16%
We see increases in ticket sales, repeat ticket buyers, donors	12%
We don't know/haven't measured audience responses.	7%
Audiences are more interested in the social aspects of attending these events than in the content.	2%
We see increased loyalty (although not increased purchases)	2%
We see low interest/less interest in these engagement activities	1%



Are you seeing any trends in audience response to your engagement programs?

- “Audiences seem to be seeking ways to personalize their experience. They want real, tangible access to the artist, whether through social networking sites, blogging and micro-blogging and post-performance discussions and lectures.”
- “... The work hasn't changed at all but we have found ways to make it clearer to the audience that it is for them.”



How would you like to see the dance field evolve regarding audience engagement?

	Total (n=205)
Create new ways/expand current ways to engage and connect with audiences, and learn more from them	39%
Use technology (especially web-based) to build relationships between audiences and artists	22%
Strengthen the public's appreciation of dance and focus on the art form	17%
Integrate audience engagement into normal operations and share best practices	14%
Build broader (and younger) audiences for dance	11%
More funding and support for the dance field	8%
Build dance into people's everyday lives, and build on the social dance already there	6%
More collaboration - across dance forms; with other artistic disciplines; with non-arts organizations	4%



“I hope that the opportunities become richer, more abundant and more diverse. Companies and organizations often see audience engagement as an add-on as opposed to an essential part of their work. Funding is always a problem but the return on investment greatly outpaces marketing. Smart and invested audiences are priceless. Direct and meaningful integration of audience engagement is critical to sustain and advance the field.”



Discussion