



Engaging Dance Audiences: Summary Assessment of Grantees' Engagement Practices

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INTRODUCTION

With support from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the James Irvine Foundation, Dance/USA launched Engaging Dance Audiences (EDA) in 2008,¹ a \$2.1 million pilot grant program to assist the dance field in testing, assessing, and learning about new and refined strategies for engaging dance audiences.

This report communicates results of research and assessment work undertaken by the EDA grantees in connection with their project support², and is intended to help share lessons learned from the grantees' experiences with the dance field. The other two components of the EDA initiative were:

- **A Learning Community.** At its core, EDA is a learning initiative for Dance/USA members and the dance field. The core of the learning community was built by joining the grantees through meetings, conference calls, and the use of social media to share challenges, successes, and questions throughout the course of their projects. The full Dance/USA membership was invited to share in the learning through the use of social media, webinars, in-person meetings, reports, and in other ways.
- **A National Survey of Dance Audiences.** Dance/USA commissioned WolfBrown to conduct the first, large-scale study of its kind on dance audiences. The overall purpose of the study was to provide dance presenters and producers with new information that will help them more effectively engage their audiences. The study was conducted in the summer of 2010 with the help of 42 partners³ who sent a standardized survey to their dance ticket buyers.

Grantee Research and Assessment

EDA grantees worked with WolfBrown to design and conduct a plan of research on their own audience engagement practices, with their own audiences. The purposes of this research were:

- To provide grantees with useful information that could improve their projects
- To generate data across the grantees that will inform and advance the field's knowledge of engagement practices

The original call for proposals invited a broad range of project ideas. Ultimately, nine diverse projects were supported. The nine projects were wide-ranging in their approaches and specific aims, but shared the common goal of engaging dance audiences more deeply in the art form. The project-specific EDA assessment research was designed in partnership with each grantee following an iterative assessment process from which learnings about audience engagement could be incorporated into future project activities. WolfBrown provided technical assistance to the grantees by honing research questions, designing data collection methods and tools, and providing assistance to execute

¹ To access all of the materials produced from the Engaging Dance Audiences initiative, please visit <http://www.danceusa.org/engagingdanceaudiences>

² From a highly competitive field of applicants, nine Dance/USA members were funded to implement and assess new or refined audience engagement practices and share their discoveries with the dance field. To learn more about each of the nine grantees' projects, please visit <http://www.danceusa.org/engagingdanceaudiencesgrantees>

³ For the list of study partners, please visit <http://www.danceusa.org/edastudypartners>



the data collection. The interim data analyses and grantee reflections on the data are archived online at <https://eda.groupsite.com>. This report communicates the overall results of the grantees' research and assessment efforts; it is not an evaluation of grantees' projects. For more information about the grantees' projects, please visit their profiles on the Dance/USA website. For your reference, hyperlinks to the online project profiles are included in the report section entitled Individual Grantee Results.

MEASURING ENGAGEMENT

Arts groups of all disciplines devote a great deal of energy these days to assisting visitors and audiences in having deeper, more meaningful arts experiences. A wide variety of methods are being developed, including pre-event contextualization, interpretive assistance, and post-event discussions. These programs are presumed to heighten anticipation and magnify impact of the arts experience on audience members, although empirical research is scarce. Within the budgetary limitations of the initiative, this report provides a first step towards objectively assessing the extent to which the EDA-supported programs affected audiences' experiences.⁴

The data collection tools—which included a range of audience surveys, and focus group and interview protocols developed specifically for each of the EDA grantees' projects—utilized constructs measuring the impact of arts experiences first developed by WolfBrown in *Assessing the Intrinsic Impacts of a Live Performance*.⁵ The measurement constructs are:

- **Captivation:** The extent to which the audience member was absorbed in the performance. Captivation is the linchpin of impact—if an audience member is captivated, then other impacts are likely to happen, whereas if he is not captivated (or worse, if he snoozes through the program), other impacts are less likely to happen.
 - Example: *Did you lose track of time and forget about everything else during the performance?*
- **Intellectual Stimulation:** The degree to which the performance triggered thinking about the art, issues, or topics, or caused critical reflection.
 - Example: *Afterwards, did you discuss the performance with others who attended? If so, was this a casual exchange or an intense exchange?*

⁴ Several researchers have conceived models for the audience experience. These include the Australia Council's model for "the arts attendance journey" (Australia Council for the Arts, *Arts audiences online: How Australian audiences are connecting with the arts online*, 2011), which spans from the moment an audience member learns about an event to the period of time after an event during which any number of meaning-making activities might occur. At a recent Chicago workshop presented by the Arts Engagement Exchange in partnership with Illinois Institute of Technology's Institute of Design, participants were taught about "the Five Es of Experience Design" and encouraged to conceptualize the audience experience in terms of five processes: Entice, Enter, Experience, Exit, and Extend (conceived by Ben Jacobson of Conifer Research, based on the Compelling Experiences Framework created by the Dublin Group). We think more in terms of an 'arc of engagement'—different for every audience member—referring to a series of interactions and experiences leading up to, extending after, and including the arts program itself. This virtuous cycle extends, sustains and reinforces an audience member's relationship with the presenter, and builds excitement for future arts experiences. For more perspective, see *Making Sense of Audience Engagement*, by Rebecca Ratzkin and Alan S. Brown, released by the San Francisco Foundation and WolfBrown in November 2011.

⁵ Brown, Alan S. and Jennifer L. Novak, *Assessing the Intrinsic Impacts of a Live Performance*, WolfBrown, 2007. Available at: www.wolfbrown.com/mup



- **Emotional Resonance:** The extent to which the audience member experienced a heightened emotional state during or after the performance.
 - Examples: *What was your emotional response to the performance?* (scale: 1=weak, 5=strong); *To what extent did you feel a bond with one or more of the dancers?*
- **Aesthetic Enrichment:** The extent to which the audience member was exposed to a new style, type of dance, or artist (growing the audience member's own aesthetic awareness), and also the extent to which the experience served to validate and celebrate familiar forms of dance (validating the audience member's aesthetic taste).
 - Example: *Did this performance expose you to a style or type of dance with which you were unfamiliar?*
- **Social Bridging and Bonding: Connectedness with the rest of the audience, new insight into one's own culture or a culture outside of one's life experience, or new perspective on human relationships or social issues.**
 - Example: *Did you feel a sense of connectedness with the rest of the audience?*

It is not reasonable to expect that a live arts experience would engage an audience member across each impact construct. The crux of this research is to understand what the differences are in impact, in engagement, and between audience members who do and audience members who do not participate in the engagement activities supported by the EDA initiative.

For additional information on emergent themes and promising practices, refer to the full report on the Dance/USA website. A technical appendix, including all instruments and topline reports, is also available under separate cover on the Dance/USA website.



STREB

SLAM REMOTE, STREB's EDA project, was designed to engage two live audiences and performers at both sites. One audience was in STREB's home performance space in Brooklyn, NY, and one was in an off-site location connected through a simulcast. The simulcast enabled STREB to perform in Brooklyn and be seen off-site, and enabled participants in the off-site location to perform for the Brooklyn-based audience.

Methods

The initial SLAM REMOTE, held in April 2010, met serious challenges.²¹ The accompanying audience and residency participant data were compiled and are not included in this report. The second SLAM REMOTE (December 4, 2010) was a fully realized version of the intended program and data collection was successfully implemented. Paper surveys were administered to audience members in both locations (Brooklyn and New Jersey), who completed them on site post-show, during which time the New Jersey State Theater hosted an open reception. Audience members were invited onstage to participate in POP ACTION with STREB company members, creating opportunities and an environment for audience members to stay after the performance. The audience survey investigated the nature of engagement and intrinsic impact, and included specific questions about the remote format. The underlying research question explored how audiences engage when experiencing a live-performance from an off-site location.

The Brooklyn-based audience members were surveyed to gain an understanding of home audiences' engagement levels with the SLAM REMOTE performance. This was done two ways:

- 1) By comparing Brooklyn-based and off-site audiences' experiences for SLAM REMOTE performances
- 2) By comparing Brooklyn-based SLAM REMOTE audiences with Brooklyn-based audiences for non-SLAM REMOTE performances

Approach (1) addressed the question: do home audiences have a different engagement experience with SLAM REMOTE compared to the off-site audiences? If so, how do they differ? For approach (2), this required surveying two non-SLAM REMOTE performances. This effort would answer the question: do home audiences have different engagement experiences with SLAM REMOTE compared to other STREB show formats? If so, how are they different?

Topline Report:	12/3 & 12/5		12/4 - Brooklyn		12/4 - New Jersey	
	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate
Number of surveys distributed:	114		63		84	
Number of surveys picked up by patrons:	114		63		84	
Number of completed surveys returned:	99	87%	62	98%	72	86%

²¹ The challenges are discussed here <https://eda.groupsites.com/post/slam-remote-update>



Results

The New Jersey audience reported the same levels of captivation as the Brooklyn SLAM²² audience (control), while the Brooklyn SLAM REMOTE audience reported slightly higher levels of captivation.

	To what degree were you <u>absorbed</u> in the performance? (circle a number)					Mean
	<u>Not at All</u>				<u>Completely</u>	
	1 -----	2 -----	3 -----	4 -----	5	
Brooklyn Control (12/3, 12/5)	1% -----	3% -----	11% -----	37% -----	47%	Mean: 4.27
Brooklyn SLAM REMOTE	0% -----	0% -----	13% -----	34% -----	53%	Mean: 4.40
New Jersey SLAM REMOTE	0% -----	0% -----	18% -----	36% -----	47%	Mean: 4.29

All three audiences reported high overall levels of captivation, suggesting that seeing the SLAM performers via broadcast did not adversely affect audience members' engagement with the performance.

The New Jersey audience reported higher levels of social bonding, compared to the Brooklyn audience. What was it about the atmosphere or the program itself that brought the audience together?

	Did you feel you were connected with the rest of the audience? (circle a number)					Mean
	<u>Not at All</u>				<u>A Great Deal</u>	
	1 -----	2 -----	3 -----	4 -----	5	
Brooklyn Control (12/3, 12/5)	4% -----	10% -----	33% -----	32% -----	21%	Mean: 3.55
Brooklyn SLAM REMOTE	3% -----	8% -----	35% -----	37% -----	18%	Mean: 3.57
New Jersey SLAM REMOTE	2% -----	7% -----	21% -----	29% -----	41%	Mean: 4.01

A vital question for STREB was whether people would pay for a broadcast performance. On average, New Jersey audience members reported that they would pay \$13 for a ticket to see a live broadcast.

Learning for the Field

- Audiences in remote locations can share in the same excitement and energy of a live performance without being in the same physical space as the performance. This represents a potential structural breakthrough in the presentation of dance. While STREB's satellite broadcast model may be too expensive for many dance companies, the dynamic exchange might be accomplished through less costly emerging video streaming technologies.
- Planning and coordinating simultaneous remote broadcasts is time intensive, technically demanding, and requires a different mindset than producing a live performance. STREB used storyboards to map out the sequence of events in advance.
- Remote broadcasting can be a means of integrating educational and community outreach programs with mainstage performances, and thereby provides mainstage audiences with a fuller picture of the company or presenter.
- Audience members at the SLAM REMOTE residency performance in New Jersey felt a stronger social bond than either Brooklyn-based audience. How does participatory involve-

²² SLAM was STREB's regular performance, without simulcast.



ment prior to, or as part of the show, amplify and deepen audience members' engagement with a performance?

