

National Endowment for the Arts

How the Arts Affect Audiences – Pilot Study

Data Collection Guidelines: **Hand-Out, Mail-Back Survey Administration**

Background of the Study

In October 2010, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) released a strategic plan establishing a new set of goals, outcomes, and performance measures for the Agency. Under the plan, a critical NEA goal is to “engage the public with diverse and excellent art” so that three specific outcomes are achieved. The first outcome is that “Americans throughout the Nation Experience Art.”

To track its performance in achieving this outcome, the NEA will conduct a survey of audiences at NEA- funded arts events nationwide. The survey will allow the NEA to measure the percentage of audiences “affected” by attendance at NEA-funded projects.

The rationale for this measure is simple: individual encounters with art can prove transformative. As NEA Chairman Rocco Landesman has stated: “Art works on and within people to change and inspire them; it addresses the need people have to create, to imagine, to aspire to something more.” As a partial measure of its success, the Agency plans to gauge the quality, depth, and nature of audience responses to NEA- funded projects.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to communicate essential information to participating grantees, including instructions for creating a sampling plan, and guidelines for surveying audiences that will maximize the probability of successful data collection efforts. WolfBrown (www.wolfbrown.com) prepared these guidelines for the National Endowment for the Arts.

Overview

As patrons leave the venue, a “survey packet” should be handed to every “Nth” patron (“N” stands for the number by which you count patrons in order to identify those who receive the survey (e.g. every 3rd person get a survey packet), thereby ensuring random selection.) Determining the appropriate “N” will depend on the size of your house and will be determined in consultation with WolfBrown.

Considerations when handing out survey packets:

- Every exit must be staffed in order to assure that surveys are randomly distributed
- Be aware that it is difficult to ensure random distribution of surveys, and many audience members exit quickly without taking a survey
- As the packet is handed out, survey staff should attempt to look each patron in the eye and quickly say, “Thanks for your feedback on tonight’s performance”
- If two people in the same party receive packets, one of them is likely to try to return the packet to survey staff. In this situation, staff should try to explain to the patron that responses are needed from both people
- If your house is small, surveys should be handed to every patron as they exit
- This survey distribution methodology can be challenging, as the general pattern and velocity of egress varies so much, and some people refuse to take a packet

In addition to distributing survey packets after the performance, survey staff will also count the number of women and men within two to three sections in the venue (to be decided upon with WolfBrown). This is a simple count and requires no interaction with the audience and will help us understand the natural gender bias associated with surveying (i.e., women are expected to respond at higher rates than men).

No survey collection effort is necessary at your venue. The instructions printed on the outer envelope and on the survey direct respondents to take the survey home, complete it within 24 hours of the performance, and mail it back in the reply envelope. Some respondents may still try to return their surveys before leaving. Ushers and staff should be advised to tell these individuals that they **MUST** mail back the form in the postage-paid envelope provided in order to have their answers counted.

Survey Packets

The survey packet consists of the following components:

1. A cover letter from the chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts
2. The survey itself (details to be confirmed)
3. A custom printed outer envelope with instructions to take the envelope home, complete the survey within 24 hours, and return it by mail
4. A postage-paid reply envelope, addressed to WolfBrown

Your survey packets will be shipped to you by our printer, Business Services Network, and will arrive assembled and ready for distribution.

Staffing Requirements and Responsibilities

You will need a “survey captain” who is in charge of handing out surveys at each of your sampled performances (i.e., the same person for all events is strongly preferred). An adequate number of volunteer or staff persons will be needed to cover all exits. Prior to the show to be surveyed, the survey captain should:

- Liaise with WolfBrown regarding expected audience size to determine number of surveys to be distributed
- Schedule time with WolfBrown to review procedures several days in advance of the event
- Make sure that survey packets have been delivered to the venue, and all other materials are ready
- Meet in advance with the house manager to alert him/her to the survey effort, work out logistics, and make sure that ushers and volunteers are briefed, so they can answer questions from patrons about the survey
- Schedule staff/volunteers to assist with survey distribution
- Ensure that response enhancement efforts are carried out (see Response Enhancement Efforts)
- Check with select office staff to find out how many tickets are sold to calculate “N” with WolfBrown liaison
- Assign survey crew to count men and women in appropriate sections (i.e., sections where seats are sold)
- Following each surveyed event, submit online Reporting Requirements (see Reporting Requirements)

Materials Checklist

The grantee is responsible for providing all materials listed below, except where specified.

1. Lobby signage (“Important Survey Tonight”)
2. Curtain Announcement Script (see Response Enhancement Efforts)
3. Survey Packets (provided by WolfBrown)

Reporting Requirements

After the survey administration, please submit the following information using the online reporting system:

1. Name of event
2. Date of event
3. The final audience count
4. Count of men and women in identified sections
5. The actual numbers of surveys distributed
6. Number of refusals (if possible)
7. Notes about survey experience for each date (e.g. notable or out of the ordinary that could affect that data)

Response Enhancement Efforts

The following efforts are suggested to increase the likelihood of cooperation and response.

1. Lobby Signage. At surveyed performances, several large signs should be placed on easels at key locations in the lobby saying *“Audience Survey Tonight – Your cooperation is greatly appreciated!”* with the NEA logo.
2. Curtain Announcements. An announcement from the stage 10 minutes prior to curtain, welcoming patrons to the theatre and asking for their cooperation with the survey. You may modify the following language to suit your venue as an addition to the script of your regular pre-curtain announcements (e.g., asking patrons to silence cell phones):

[10 minutes prior to curtain]. *“Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to tonight’s performance of [Title]. The National Endowment for the Arts very much needs your feedback on tonight’s performance. Staff will be distributing take-home surveys as you exit the theatre. We kindly request your cooperation if you are handed a survey, as your feedback is essential to our future work. Thank you, and enjoy the show.”*