



Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism, Arts Division

The Values Study

Rediscovering the Meaning and Value of Arts Participation

Made possible by The Wallace Foundation's State Arts
Partnerships for Cultural Participation (START) Program

July 2004



Alan S. Brown & Associates LLC

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Tourism, Arts Division**

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Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism
755 Main Street, One Financial Plaza, Hartford, CT 06103
Telephone: (860) 566-4770



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Abstract

The Values Study was an organic, participatory learning experience for teams of board and staff members representing 20 Connecticut arts organizations. During the autumn of 2003, each team conducted five individual depth interviews with randomly-recruited program participants, and synthesized what they learned through a step by step process that culminated in a statewide meeting on November 17, 2003. The process was designed to juxtapose existing programs with consumer values, and sparked a statewide discussion about mission, relevance and public value. Participants acquired interviewing skills and learned the benefits and challenges of qualitative research. Many ideas for innovative programs and projects spun out of this dialogue, several of which were funded through a follow-up grant program from July 2004 to December 2005. The study's most important outcome is not this report, but a new level of understanding of the complexity of arts participation in Connecticut, and new frameworks for thinking about how consumers engage in and benefit from arts activities.

A Note About Replication

This report was written primarily for the benefit of those who might replicate the study, in whole or in part, in their communities or within their organizations as a board/staff development exercise. With this in mind, the third section contains the Participant's Handbook, a comprehensive guide to the study process and research methods employed, including all protocols and discussion guides. All rights are reserved by the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism and Alan S. Brown & Associates LLC. For information about using these materials or conducting a similar study in your area, contact Alan Brown at 203-259-7219.

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Alan Brown, Principal



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A Message from An-Ming Truxes

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the Values Study. This report represents the collective work of twenty Connecticut arts organizations in partnership with the Arts Division to gain a better sense of why people participate in the arts. The work is part of a long-term process of understanding consumer values.

The Study has provided new vocabulary and constructs with which to describe the multi-dimensions of creativity and the complex set of values surrounding artistic engagement. The Arts Division's goals for the Study are three-fold: (1) develop a learning community in the state to build and share knowledge about arts participation, (2) uncover new connections between consumer values and program innovation, and (3) enhance the Arts Division's own grant-making strategies and relationships with grantees and the public.

Were it not for the impetus of the Wallace Foundation's State Arts Partnerships for Cultural Participation (START) initiative, the Arts Division, formerly the Commission on the Arts, would not have launched into the Values Study in 2003, a time of agency consolidation. In 2001, Connecticut was one of thirteen state arts agencies that received multi-year grants from Wallace to participate in START and develop new and more effective strategies that will broaden, deepen, and diversify local cultural participation. Since that time the context for START has evolved, placing greater emphasis on a state arts agency's public value. Instead of simply looking at new ways for state arts agencies to help arts organizations increase participation, START is focusing on what is publicly valuable about the work of a state arts agency and examining the centrality of arts participation to this work.

We are enormously grateful to Wallace – in particular, Michael Moore, Director of Arts Programs, and his team – for their leadership in pushing the field to understand the relationship between public value and arts participation. We are proud that our Values Study – which heard directly from Connecticut citizens about how and why they "fit" arts into their lives – is contributing to this dialogue.

Thanks go to the twenty teams of arts organization board and staff that made the 100 interviews possible and for their diligence and enthusiasm in working with the Arts Division as co-producers and co-partners in this venture. And special thanks to consultants Bitsie Clark for her wisdom, guidance, and coordination, and Alan Brown, who designed the Values Study, for his vision, intellect and facilitation.

I hope you will find the Values Study helpful.

*An-Ming Truxes, Director, Arts Division
Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism*



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Participating Organizations

The Values Study was a participatory learning experience commissioned by the Arts Division of the State of Connecticut's Commission on Culture and Tourism, as part of the Commission's grant through the Wallace Foundation's START program. The following 20 cultural organizations were partners in the study.

Visual Arts

Artspace, Inc. (New Haven) - *Kate Paranteau, Helen Kauder, Elinor Buxton*

Arts Council of Greater New Haven - *Betty Monz, Paula Armbruster, Manuel Rivera*

Creative Arts Workshop (New Haven) - *Susan Smith, Rusti Icenogle, Tom Griggs*

Mattatuck Museum (Waterbury) - *Kjell Wangensteen, Marie Galbraith, Christine Jewell*

Silvermine Guild Arts Center (New Canaan) - *Pamela Gallagher, Cindy Clair, Penny Putnam*

Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art (Hartford) - *Emilie de Brigard, Cindy Weiss, Claire Matthews, Pat Faulds*

Music

Chamber Music PLUS (Hartford) - *Johannes Neuer, Don Carso, Harry Clark*

Connecticut Choral Society - *Lucinda Hunt-Stowell, Alice Seymour*

Neighborhood Music School (New Haven) - *Michelle Maitland, Larry Zukof, Carol Ross, Linda Burt*

Stamford Symphony Orchestra (Stamford) - *Barbara Soroca, Nick Rudd, Elaine Carroll*

Westport Arts Center (Westport) - *Nancy Diamond, Eileen Wiseman, Herb Meyers*

Dance

Center for the Arts – Wesleyan University (Middletown) - *Barbara Ally, Pamela Tatge, Kristen Olson*

Music and Arts Center for Humanity (Bridgeport) - *Denise Mallard, Alan Fox, Shawna Johnson, Elsa Sapien*

Nutmeg Conservatory (Torrington) - *Sara Zordan, Sharon Dante, Kent Humphrey*

Sankofa Kuumba Cultural Arts Consortium (Hartford) - *Rhonda Patman, Christine Dixon-Smith, Silas Shannon*

Theater

Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts (Hartford) - *Carolyn Hebert, Tod Kallenbach, Ronna Reynolds*

CAPA/Shubert Theater (New Haven) - *Ian Solomon, Kathleen Sloan, Anthony Lupinacci, Bridget Carmichael*

Curtain Call (Stamford) - *Peter Barbieri, Lou Ursone, Brent McKinley*

Long Wharf Theater (New Haven) - *Randy Voit, Michael Stotts, Robin Sauerteig*

Stamford Theatre Works (Stamford) - *Miriam Shaw, Steve Karp, Larry Frenock*



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The Values Study, Part 1: Overview

*A New Approach to Learning
About Arts Participation*



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Overview

The Values Study was conceived as part of a larger process of strengthening arts participation in the State of Connecticut, made possible by a grant through the Wallace Foundation's START program (State Arts Partnerships for Cultural Participation). The goal of the START program is to create standards, practices and capacities that enhance public participation in the arts.

The Values Study was not so much a research study as it was a participatory learning process that sparked a new conversation about the value of art and the landscape of arts participation in Connecticut. Teams of arts administrators and board members from 20 Connecticut arts groups conducted in-depth interviews with a small number of their own program participants and nonusers in an effort to glimpse the world of arts participation through the eyes of their constituents. The study was designed and facilitated by Alan Brown. An-Ming Truxes and Frances Clark of the Arts Division provided essential support throughout.

The Values Study was unusual in that responsibility for data gathering fell to the client, not the consultant. Instead of hiring a consultant to conduct the research and make a report, the consultant designed a process in which the client (e.g., Connecticut arts administrators) gathered data and synthesized. The consultant's role was one of facilitation and provocation. A complete description of the study process appears in the third section of this report, along with copies of the various protocols and discussion outlines, and a rationale statement that places the study context with other research.

The Values Study generated a large volume of data, including over 600 responses to a lengthy online arts participation survey, written "arts participation profiles" of 100 Connecticut citizens (40 of which appear in Part 2 of this report), synthesis documents for each of the 20 organizations, values discussions for each of the four artistic disciplines investigated (e.g., music, dance, theater and the visual arts), and a final presentation that boils everything down into a few key thoughts.

The real value of the study, however, lies not in the various written documents, but derives from the process itself: the interviewing skills acquired; strengthened relationships between board and staff members; a sense of common purpose across organizations and disciplines, a heightened sense of collegiality and, most of all, a fresh perspective on why people participate in arts activities and how the infrastructure of nonprofit arts organizations connects with – or in some cases doesn't – the value systems surrounding different arts activities.

The participatory nature of the study allowed for a high level of dialogue and learning. It is one thing for arts managers and board members to read research reports and attend presentations on arts participation, and another thing entirely for them to hear their own constituents speak directly about how arts activities fit



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into their lives and what they value about arts participation. The information resonates in a way that is not possible through other means of dissemination.

By the end of the study, board and staff members of Connecticut arts institutions were learning from each other, peer-to-peer. The final meeting in Hartford on November 17, 2003 was an intense exchange about the value of art to individuals and to society as a whole. How often do arts leaders get together and talk about art, mission and relevance? Not often enough, if this study was an indication.

The Values Study was more than a conversation about art, however. The process was designed to confront arts managers and board members with a juxtaposition, however dissonant, between their existing programs and consumer needs and wants. For example, what are the programmatic implications to arts groups of the very significant value that consumers derive from home-based arts activities? The ensuing discussion cuts to the heart of mission, relevance and institutional identity.

As a result, the Values Study generated a substantial set of innovative ideas for how nonprofit arts organizations can achieve greater relevance in their communities. A small number of these ideas were funded through a follow-up granting process made possible through the Wallace Foundation's START program.

The policy implications of the Value Study are significant for the State of Connecticut, as well. The State's Arts Division has a new framework for building public value around arts activities – a holistic framework centered around benefits to the individual rather than one that responds to the artistic vision and financial needs of arts organizations.

In short, the Values Study was an organic, participatory learning experience for arts administrators and board members. The study's most important outcome is not this report, but a new level of clarity and understanding of the complexity of arts participation in Connecticut that lives in the hearts and minds of those who participated.

It is the sincere hope of the authors that the materials in this document will be useful to other arts agencies, funders and institutions as they seek to elevate the conversation in their communities about arts participation and public value.



Themes or “Red Threads”

An invisible red thread connects those who are destined to meet, regardless of time, place, or circumstance. The thread may stretch or tangle but will never break. - Chinese folk tale

The following themes or “Red Threads” capture the essence of what was learned through the Values Study. These are not conclusions based on statistical analysis, but rather grounded theories synthesized from 100 individual depth interviews.

1. In the eyes of the consumer, we are all part of an inter-related arts ecosystem – a continuum of involvement opportunities across the disciplines that occur in a range of settings. The five modes of arts participation are inventive, interpretive, curatorial, observational and ambient.
2. The more creative control you have over an artistic experience, the more value it can yield. Inventive and interpretive arts participation creates value for others, as well as yourself.
3. Many people derive a great deal of value from collecting or “curating” art for their private use, including music, crafts and fine art. Collected art often takes on the added symbolic value of one’s life experiences. Not a lot of nonprofits are active in this mode of participation.
4. Value to the individual is not necessarily dependent on the level of knowledge, technical skill or competency with the art form.
5. Many people who are very talented and creative do not consider themselves to be “artists.” It seems that a lot of people have a low regard for their own artistic abilities, even if they are highly creative. This raises a key question: How can we build value around creativity, so that art-making at any level of skill is encouraged, valued and respected in our communities?
6. In almost every interview, we witnessed the impact of childhood arts experiences on adult participation and overall quality of life. The importance of arts experiences for children is a value that transcends politics, race and class. If this is such a deeply held value, then why are such scant resources devoted to arts education?
7. Some people are attuned to the intrinsic aesthetic value of their surroundings. They appreciate the compositional elements of just about any object or vision: color, form, texture, contrast, etc. They see the art of nature, and notice and appreciate the subtleties and nuances of design. This “aesthetic awareness” enhances their lives enormously.
8. Many people have latent or “unactualized” interests in various art forms and activities. One might infer that our communities would benefit from



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- more “low-threshold success opportunities” to explore and awaken more of our collective creative potential.
9. Some people access one art form through another art form that is more familiar to them. For example, visually-oriented people appreciate the visual aspects of a theater production (i.e., lighting, sets and costumes), while language-oriented people talk about the story. Art forms that appeal to “multiple intelligences” (e.g., musical theater) attract more people because they are accessible from different intelligences (i.e., kinetic, musical, visual, narrative).¹
 10. Authenticity is a core value for some people, who are attracted to the “realness” of art, be it folk art, art of indigenous peoples, historically accurate settings, and personal connections with artists. Some people go out of their way for authentic arts experiences, and arts experiences in unusual settings.
 11. A small number of people seek a high level of risk and provocation in their arts activities (e.g., “I want to be disturbed”). These people are more likely to be arts omnivores – very interested in multiple art forms.
 12. Personal connections with artists can bridge a relevance gap and ignite latent arts interests and inspire participation.
 13. Parents, especially during their early child-rearing years, often don’t have time for self-guided arts activities and shift their focus to facilitating their children’s arts participation – which is sometimes their only connection to the arts for a long while. Retirement is seen by some as an opportunity to re-awaken old arts interests and to cultivate new ones.

¹ *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, by Howard Gardiner, 1983.



Study Methodology

The study was designed as a participatory learning experience for Connecticut arts administrators and board members, drawing on the technique of individual depth interviewing. Twenty organizations completed the study. A copy of the Participant's Handbook, including all the various protocols and discussion guides, appears in section three of this report.

Fifteen of the twenty participating organizations were selected to receive support from the study consultant, based on geography and budget size. Support included assistance with recruitment and facilitation of a synthesis meeting following completion of the interviews. Additionally, the study consultant, along with representatives from the State, observed approximately 40 interviews in all corners of the state, and led debriefing sessions immediately afterwards.

A summary of the study methodology follows:

1. Orientation Meeting. The Arts Division conducted a statewide study orientation meeting on July 17, 2003 in New Haven. Prior to the meeting, the entire study was conceptualized and a Participant's Handbook was written. Teams of three people from a cross-section of Connecticut arts organizations attended the orientation meeting, including at least one board member (required). The meeting included a discussion of the study process, a presentation on existing knowledge about "The Why of Arts Participation," a presentation on interviewing techniques by Rebecca Severson, an anthropologist with the Field Museum in Chicago, and two rounds of practice interviews. At the conclusion of the orientation meeting, teams were prepared to head back to their communities to recruit interviewees and conduct the interviews.
2. Role Assignments. Three roles were defined for each team: the interviewer (usually the staff CEO), who led the conversations, the recorder (usually a board member), whose job was to take notes during the conversation, and the recruiter (usually another staff member), who took responsibility for recruitment and logistics. More information about these roles appears in the Participants' Handbook.
3. Recruitment. Each organization recruited five interviewees based on their responses to an online pre-recruitment survey. The goal was to select individuals representing a range of involvement levels with the institution, including both high-frequency users and nonusers who are culturally active. During the interviews, information from the online survey was used by the interviewer to probe the respondent's various arts activities. Interviewees were required to sign a Consent Release form.
4. Interviews. Interviews were conducted across the state, usually at the participating organization's office, although a variety of other settings were used including coffee houses, restaurants and focus group facilities.



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Each organization was furnished with a customized interview protocol consisting of three sections: 1) an initial section exploring the respondent's various connections to the arts, 2) a section that hones in on the discipline of interest, and 3) a section that explores the respondent's relationship with the specific organization.

5. Debriefing. Whenever possible, the study consultant or a representative from the State's Arts Division attended the first interview, to observe and provide process feedback to the teams, and also to facilitate a debriefing session immediately afterwards. These facilitated debriefing sessions proved to be very useful in terms of generating hypotheses and other ideas about arts participation. At the conclusion of each interview, respondents were photographed digitally.
6. Written Profiles. Within 24 hours of the interview, the interviewer and the recorder co-authored a one-page written profile of each interviewee. The general idea was to capture the spirit of the conversation while the details were still fresh in mind.
7. Team Synthesis Meetings. After all five interviews were completed, the study team held a synthesis meeting, the purpose of which was to summarize each interview and discuss themes. Most of the synthesis meetings were facilitated by the study consultant. The product of each of these meetings was seven-page PowerPoint presentation, which served as a written summary of the five interviews. Two lists were produced during the synthesis meeting, a list of "grounded theories" (i.e., hypotheses that are supported by research data) and a list of meanings and values associated with the discipline.
8. Discipline Meetings. Four discipline meetings were held, one each for music, dance, theater and visual arts organizations. At the discipline meetings, two people from each organization discussed one interview each, while a photograph of the interview subject was projected onto a screen. Following these presentations, the study consultant facilitated a discussion about the range of participation levels for that discipline, and the associated meanings and values.
9. Final Meeting. A final statewide meeting was held on November 17, 2003 in Hartford. Rotating through the four disciplines, a representative from each of the 20 organizations was given three minutes to summarize key observations from the interviews and to comment on the study process. A limited amount of discussion followed each discipline. The first part of the day concluded with a summary of the entire study by the consultant. The second half of the program was devoted to generating a list of ideas for innovative programs and projects growing out of the study, and for reviewing grant guidelines.



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Limitations of the Data

The Values Study was a qualitative research effort involving a very limited number of personal interviews. Five interviews were conducted by each of the 20 participating organizations, for a total of 100 interviews. Results are not statistically representative of any population, although many themes emerged. The value of the data lies in its depth, not in its breadth or statistical validity.

Generally, interviewees were recruited from within each organization's known universe of visitors, class participants or ticket buyers, although some organizations recruited nonusers from outside of their known constituency. Some level of randomness was achieved in recruiting interviewees within the constituent base of each organization.

Although numerous interviews were conducted with people of color, the number of these interviews was not proportionate to census estimates for the population of Connecticut. It was not a goal of the study to achieve representative demographics in the respondent pool, although an effort was made ensure some level of diversity with respect to age, income, race and geography.

Most of the data represents the viewpoints and life experiences of people who are involved – and in some cases extremely involved – in organized arts activities. Very few people whose cultural participation takes place entirely outside of the infrastructure of nonprofit arts groups were interviewed, although many people reported active participation in arts activities at home, and in churches and schools. A companion study to this one would investigate the values surrounding arts participation among people who are not connected to nonprofit arts groups.



Process Lessons

The Values Study was an experiment in collaborative, experiential learning. The process lessons that follow reflect the experience of the study consultant and are not the result of a formal evaluation. They are offered for the benefit of those who might consider replicating the study in some form or another.

1. Even though only five interviews were conducted by each team, the total investment of time and energy on the part of participating organizations was much greater than anyone imagined. On the other hand, the financial investment in the study, not counting the value of everyone's time, was quite modest.
2. The interviews were organized in three sequential cycles. This iterative approach to study design allowed for mid-course process and content corrections, which benefited subsequent cycles. The iterative design of the study was beneficial in other ways: with each conversation, the interviewers got substantially better at interviewing; each conversation was informed by themes from the previous conversations such that the amount of learning increased across the five interviews; the stepwise design of the synthesis process (i.e., debriefing sessions after each interview, a team synthesis meeting, the discipline meetings, and the final statewide meeting) brought more and more context to each organization's discovery process and allowed for cross-fertilization of ideas across organizations; the consultant's understanding of the process improved with each cycle (e.g., the interview protocols were improved after each cycle, the agenda for the discipline meetings was refined after each one); and the conceptual models described in the next section were repeatedly tested and, in fact, evolved substantially. Future studies of a similar nature will benefit from iterative data collection and cumulative synthesis.
3. The conversations were deep and revealing – and at times emotional. In a comfortable and respectful environment, most people opened up with little hesitation. Of course there were exceptions. The skill of the interviewer had much to do with the quality of the conversation. Some people came to their interview with a pre-determined set of ideas (i.e., an agenda) to communicate.
4. Learning occurred on a peer basis, both within and across institutions. At the discipline meetings and final statewide meeting, people were prepared to perform in front of their peers. In hindsight, the peer dynamic was an essential ingredient in the study. The dynamic between board members and staff members within each team also tended to raise the bar in terms of effort level and quality of thinking.
5. Teams of board and staff members from different arts groups were on equal footing going into the study. This had the effect of democratizing the conversation about arts participation. In fact, some of the greatest



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contributions came from those associated with small organizations. The contributions of board members were particularly noteworthy.

6. The accumulated knowledge and experience of the investigators (i.e., board and staff members) was more significant to the overall success of the study than the data itself. The data served as a lightning rod for discussion. The knowledge and experience of the investigators was the prism through which data were refracted, analyzed and synthesized. Because of their qualifications, the investigators were able to hear things that respondents were trying to say but couldn't, and things that they said but didn't mean. Many of the interviews danced around the subconscious.
7. Individual depth interviewing takes practice, but the learning curve is speedy with an appropriate amount of training, feedback and experience. Almost everyone has conversation skills, and many people pride themselves on their conversation skills. Depth interviewing is really just disciplined conversation. As such, it is an accessible research technique for arts administrators.
8. The Values Study was a heavily facilitated process. A great deal of the value to participants happened through interactions with each other and with the study support team. The relatively small geographical area encompassed by the State of Connecticut made it possible for the study support team to appear for interviews and meetings across the state. This might not be the case in other situations. Future studies of a similar nature should be designed with this in mind.

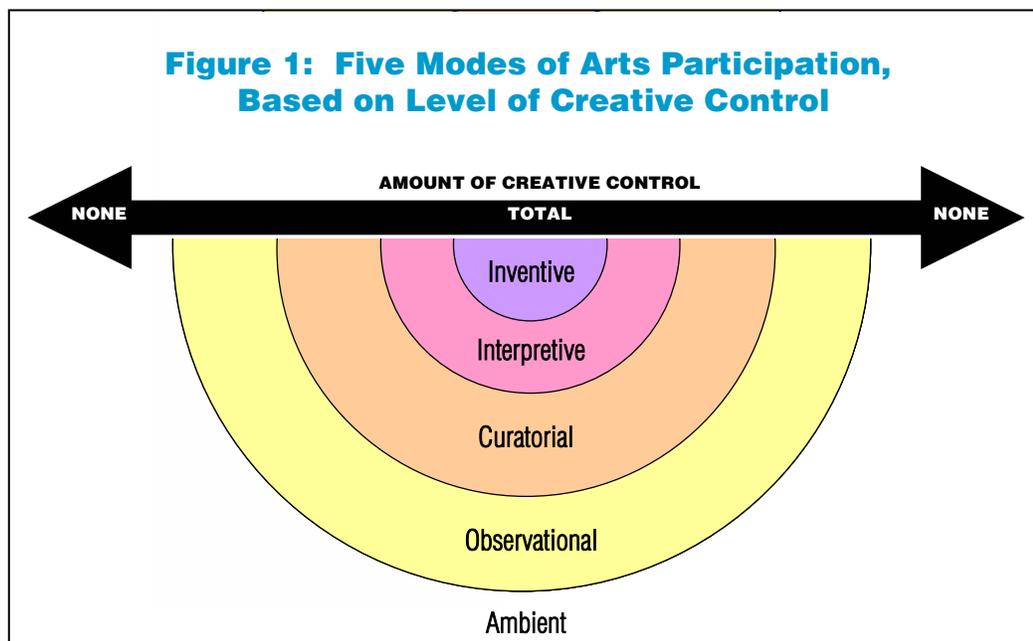


Mapping An Individual's Arts Activities: Towards A New Conceptual Framework

What does the universe of potential arts activities look like to an individual? If we could map the answer to this question in a two-dimensional conceptual space, it would be possible to understand how individuals construct their total arts experience. We might be able to see connections between art forms and patterns of involvement across the art forms. Moreover, such a framework could be used as a policy tool – to evaluate the supply of arts opportunities in a given community and to understand how arts activities offered by specific institutions fit in to a larger picture. Gaps in the supply of arts programs could be identified on a methodical basis, as well as opportunities.

Five Modes of Arts Participation

During the course of the 100 interviews conducted during the Values Study, respondents discussed their involvement in myriad arts activities. At the four discipline meetings, lists were made of the various types of arts activities within each discipline. Across the disciplines studied, five fundamentally different types of arts activities can be discerned, as illustrated in Figure 1, based on the relative amount of creative control exercised by the individual.





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1. Inventive Arts Participation engages the mind, body and spirit in an act of artistic creation that is unique and idiosyncratic, regardless of skill level.
2. Interpretive Arts Participation is a creative act of self-expression that brings alive and adds value to pre-existing works of art, either individually or collaboratively.
3. Curatorial Arts Participation is the creative act of purposefully selecting, organizing and collecting art to the satisfaction of one's own artistic sensibility.
4. Observational Arts Participation encompasses arts experiences that an individual selects or consents to, motivated by some expectation of value.
5. Ambient Arts Participation involves experiencing art, consciously or subconsciously, that is not purposefully selected – art that “happens to you.”

These five modes of participation transcend discipline, genre, cultural context and skill level. The framework is equally useful in describing vastly different arts activities. For example, downloading holiday music from the Internet and burning your own CD compilation would be classified as curatorial arts participation, as would collecting museum-quality art for home display. The amount of creative control exercised over these two different activities is the commonality.

During the Values Study interviews, it became obvious that characterizing arts participation as either “active” or “passive” was overly simplistic and inaccurate. Some people are passionately consumed by observational participation (e.g., attending concerts), while some of the people who make art are relatively detached from its meaning. In other words, the centrality of an arts activity to an individual is not always a function of the level of creative control.

Neither is centrality a function of skill level. Numerous respondents spoke of the great joy and satisfaction they derive from arts activities in which they have little training or technical knowledge. Later, we will discuss different levels of meaning that are possible with increased knowledge and skill. But in defining modes of arts participation, we must be careful not to make value judgments about the validity or worth of arts experiences based on skill level.

Given this framework, it is possible to map the various types of music, dance, theater and visual arts activities described by respondents during the Values Study interviews (see Figure 2 – Involvement Opportunities). In the center of the diagram are inventive activities for each discipline, and at the periphery of the diagram are ambient activities associated with each discipline. Unfortunately, it was not possible to extend the study to other arts disciplines such as media arts and literature, but one can easily imagine them as additional sectors in the Figure 2 diagram.

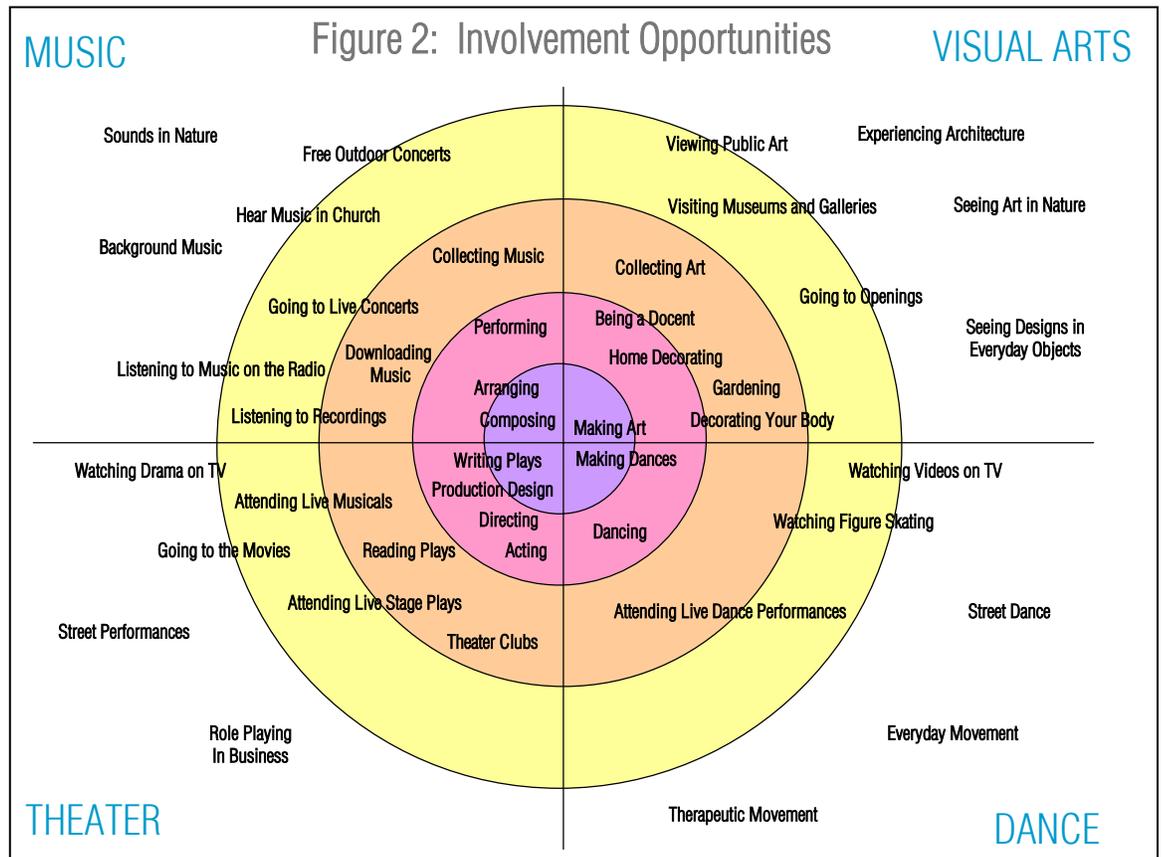
Imagine using this Involvement Framework to inventory the availability of arts activities in a specific community. One might discover, for example, an



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abundance of interpretive involvement opportunities in music but not dance. Similarly, one might find that curatorial arts activities, which are so meaningful to people, tend to happen outside the infrastructure of nonprofit arts organizations. What would be the policy implications of such a finding? It is not difficult to see the potential for such an analysis to inform cultural policy at the community level.



The Involvement Framework also holds potential value for arts institutions. Can you place your institution's program offerings into this framework? What modes of participation do you offer? What are some involvement opportunities that you don't currently offer that you might offer in order to tap into new veins of meaning and relevance in your community?

Lastly, the Involvement Framework can also be used to map the totality of an individual's arts participation at a given moment in time and, by extension, to understand how an individual's arts participation changes over time. It might also be helpful as a framework for understanding differences in patterns of arts participation across cultural groups.



Values Surrounding Arts Participation

The primary objective of the Value Study was to gain new perspective on “The Why of Arts Participation” – why do people participate in arts activities? What value do they seek from the experience? What benefits do they reap? Nearly everyone understands that arts participation is beneficial at some level, although few people – including many arts managers and board members – can articulate more than a few general ideas as to how it is beneficial.

In an effort to “speak the language” of politicians and businesses, arts advocates learned to justify their programs in terms of economic impact: job creation, ancillary spending, incremental tax revenue, etc. Notwithstanding the grain of truth in the economic impact argument, it is tangential, at best, as justification for investments in the cultural health of a community. Advancement efforts are severely handicapped by a “void of germane metrics” – a cohesive and compelling value framework that justifies the real worth of arts activities in simple terms that anyone can understand.

If asked, how many arts managers or board members could answer the question “How are you different after seeing a live performance than you were beforehand?” How many public officials with budget authority over arts agencies could answer that question? The arts industry suffers for lack of a simple value framework that communicates our worth to society and to the individuals we serve.

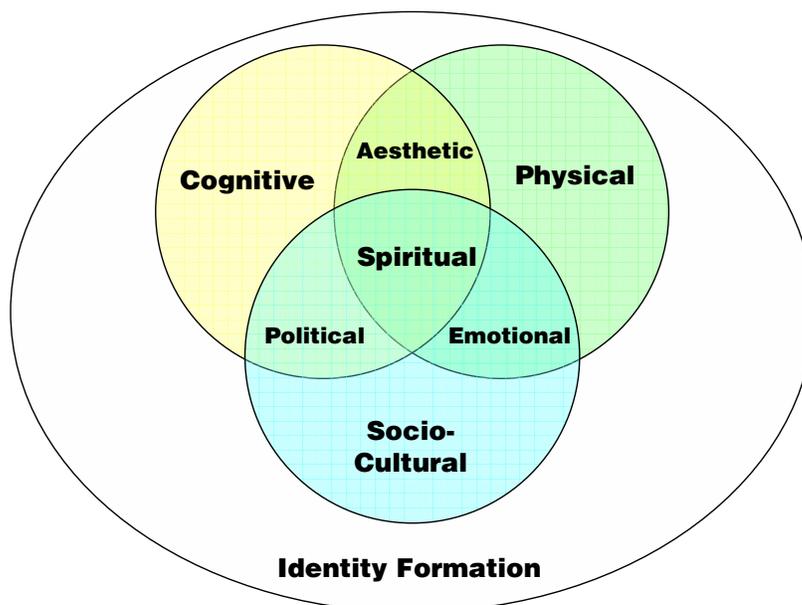
Researching the meaning and value of arts participation is difficult because much of the action happens at the subconscious level which, of course, most people can't talk about. Advanced qualitative research techniques have been used successfully to uncover the labyrinth of subconscious constructs surrounding arts participation, although this knowledge has yet to find practical application in the field on any sort of a widespread basis.² While the Values Study relied on a relatively simple data collection method to gather information (i.e., the personal interview), the knowledge generated was informed by a great deal of experience with the subject matter.

A synthesis of the long lists of meanings and values produced by each of the 20 Values Study teams suggests eight different value clusters associated with arts participation, as illustrated in Figure 3. A Venn Diagram was employed to illustrate the value clusters, because it depicts the dynamic and overlapping relationships between them. A short description of the eight value clusters follows.

² Of particular note is the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET), a proprietary methodology developed by Professor Gerald Zaltman of the Harvard Business School's Mind of the Market Laboratory. Zaltman's 1998 report “Understanding Thoughts and Feelings About the Arts,” commissioned by the Heinz Endowments, represents a breakthrough in understanding why people participate in arts activities.



Figure 3: Values Derived from Arts Participation



1. Arts Participation has cognitive value in that it productively engages the brain, activates the imagination and directly or indirectly helps adults and children acquire new or improved cognitive skills.
2. Aesthetic value, the *prima facie* benefit of arts participation, is the most subjective and intrinsic of all values surrounding arts participation; during the art experience (and possibly for a lifetime thereafter), the participant's quality of life is altered in some way by the art.
3. A set of physical values surrounds some arts experiences, particularly dance, but also any of the other arts experiences that engage the body, such as playing a musical instrument or working with clay. The body acquires new skills or achieves consonance with mind and spirit.
4. Many people talk about the emotional value of music, but any arts experience that elicits an emotional response has intrinsic value. Art acts as a conduit for emotion, providing the participant with a means of feeling.
5. Almost all arts participation has socio-cultural value, in that it connects people with their community or with their cultural heritage. For many, art is also a means of understanding other cultures. Art is memory.
6. Sometimes subtly, sometimes not, art has political value. For artists and audiences alike, art is an essential means of formulating and expressing political views.
7. Some people talk about the spiritual value of art, but it is generally not something that most people can articulate. More likely, people talk about "being transformed" or "renewed" or "energized" by an arts experience.

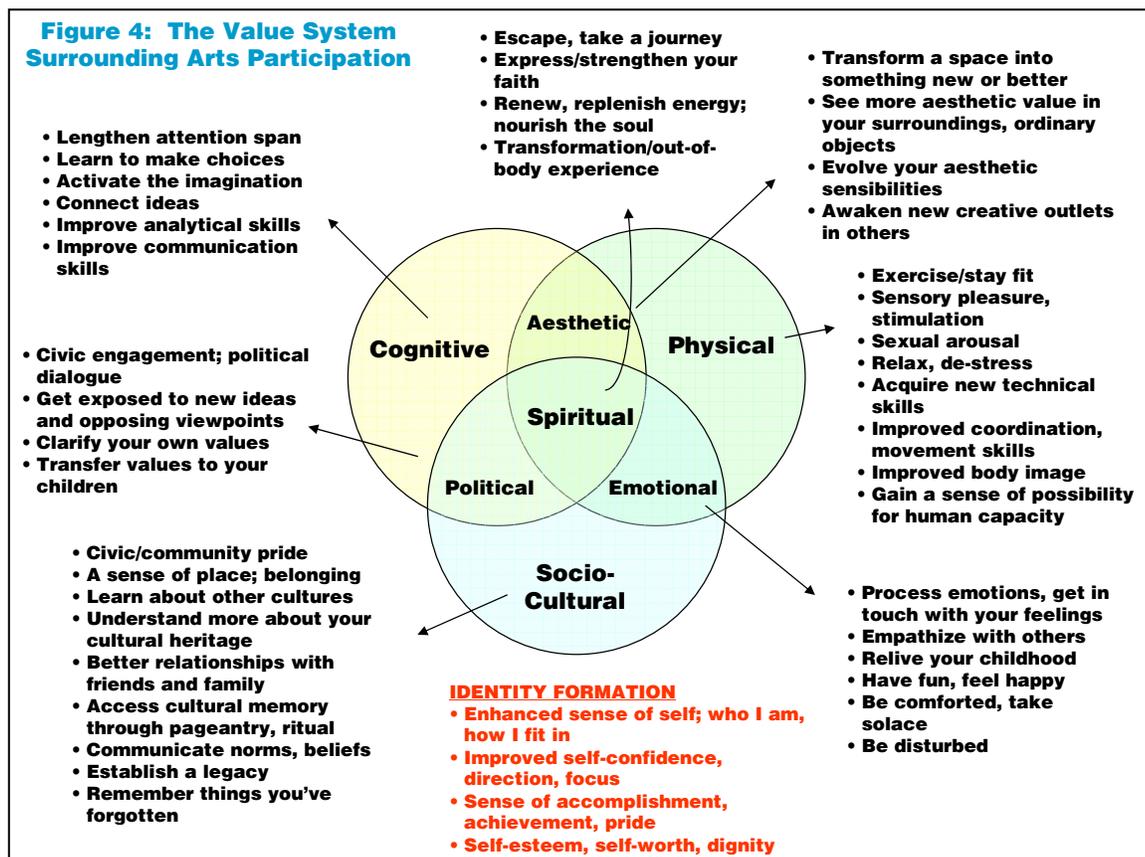


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8. In addition to these seven value clusters, another overarching value set surrounds arts participation – the set of values associated with identity formation, such as self-confidence, self-esteem, pride and dignity.

An annotated version of the value system diagram appears in Figure 4.



Using the Values Framework

Arts organizations can use the Value Framework to better understand how their programs resonate with audiences and visitors, and to think about new programs or how to add value to their existing programs. The framework allows arts organizations to see their programs through the eyes of current and potential users. What value connections are being made? What other value opportunities might be offered through new or different programs? Several examples of how to use the Value Framework are provided below.



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Example 1: Sitting on a Decorative Public Bench

Here is an example of Ambient Arts Participation. What value does this arts participant get from sitting on the bench pictured below? Through use of bolded text, some of the values that might be associated with this activity are identified.

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p><u>COGNITIVE</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lengthen attention span • Learn to make choices • Activate the imagination • Connect ideas • Improve analytical skills • Improve communication skills | <p><u>SPIRITUAL</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Escape, take a journey • Express/strengthen your faith • Renew, replenish energy; nourish the soul • Transformation/out-of-body experience | <p><u>AESTHETIC</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transform a space into something new or better • See more aesthetic value in your surroundings, ordinary objects • Evolve your aesthetic sensibilities • Awaken new creative outlets in others |
| <p><u>POLITICAL</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic engagement; political dialogue • Get exposed to new ideas and opposing viewpoints • Clarify your own values • Transfer values to your children |  | <p><u>PHYSICAL</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise/stay fit • Sensory pleasure, stimulation • Sexual arousal • Relax, de-stress • Acquire new technical skills • Improved coordination, movement skills • Improved body image • Gain a sense of possibility for human capacity |
| <p><u>SOCIO-CULTURAL</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic/community pride • A sense of place; belonging • Learn about other cultures • Understand more about your cultural heritage • Better relationships with friends and family • Access cultural memory through pageantry, ritual • Communicate norms, beliefs • Establish a legacy • Remember things you've forgotten | <p><u>IDENTITY FORMATION</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced sense of self; who I am, how I fit in • Improved self-confidence, direction, focus • Sense of accomplishment, achievement, pride • Self-esteem, self-worth, dignity | <p><u>EMOTIONAL</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process emotions, get in touch with your feelings • Empathize with others • Relive your childhood • Have fun, feel happy • Be comforted, take solace • Be disturbed |

Certainly the activity has some aesthetic value, but there are also political values and socio-cultural values, as well. If you were testifying in front of the City Council in this community, could you make a case for the political value of this arts experience?

What other values or benefits might accrue to the participant as a result of this activity?



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Example 2: Break Dancing in the Street

Here is an example of Inventive Arts Participation. From the perspective of the participant dancing in the photo below (not the observers), what value does this activity generate?

The activity clearly holds various physical benefits to the participant, but also probably other values, including political, emotional and socio-cultural. Moreover, this arts activity may be closely tied to the participant's identity.

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p><u>COGNITIVE</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lengthen attention span • Learn to make choices • Activate the imagination • Connect ideas • Improve analytical skills • Improve communication skills | <p><u>SPIRITUAL</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Escape, take a journey • Express/strengthen your faith • Renew, replenish energy; nourish the soul • Transformation/out-of-body experience | <p><u>AESTHETIC</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transform a space into something new or better • See more aesthetic value in your surroundings, ordinary objects • Evolve your aesthetic sensibilities • Awaken new creative outlets in others |
| <p><u>POLITICAL</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic engagement; political dialogue • Get exposed to new ideas and opposing viewpoints • Clarify your own values • Transfer values to your children |  | <p><u>PHYSICAL</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise/stay fit • Sensory pleasure, stimulation • Sexual arousal • Relax, de-stress • Acquire new technical skills • Improved coordination, movement skills • Improved body image • Gain a sense of possibility for human capacity |
| <p><u>SOCIO-CULTURAL</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic/community pride • A sense of place; belonging • Learn about other cultures • Understand more about your cultural heritage • Better relationships with friends and family • Access cultural memory through pageantry, ritual • Communicate norms, beliefs • Establish a legacy • Remember things you've forgotten | <p><u>IDENTITY FORMATION</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced sense of self; who I am, how I fit in • Improved self-confidence, direction, focus • Sense of accomplishment, achievement, pride • Self-esteem, self-worth, dignity | <p><u>EMOTIONAL</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process emotions, get in touch with your feelings • Empathize with others • Relive your childhood • Have fun, feel happy • Be comforted, take solace • Be disturbed |

How would the value system be different if we looked at this activity from the eyes of the observers surrounding the participant?



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Example 3: Viewing Human Sculpture in the Street

Here's another example of Ambient Arts Participation. Imagine that you walked around the corner at lunchtime and happened upon the scenario illustrated in the photo below. What value would you derive from the experience?

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p><u>COGNITIVE</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lengthen attention span • Learn to make choices • Activate the imagination • Connect ideas • Improve analytical skills • Improve communication skills | <p><u>SPIRITUAL</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Escape, take a journey • Express/strengthen your faith • Renew, replenish energy; nourish the soul • Transformation/out-of-body experience | <p><u>AESTHETIC</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transform a space into something new or better • See more aesthetic value in your surroundings, ordinary objects • Evolve your aesthetic sensibilities • Awaken new creative outlets in others |
| <p><u>POLITICAL</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic engagement; political dialogue • Get exposed to new ideas and opposing viewpoints • Clarify your own values • Transfer values to your children |  | <p><u>PHYSICAL</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise/stay fit • Sensory pleasure, stimulation • Sexual arousal • Relax, de-stress • Acquire new technical skills • Improved coordination, movement skills • Improved body image • Gain a sense of possibility for human capacity |
| <p><u>SOCIO-CULTURAL</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic/community pride • A sense of place; belonging • Learn about other cultures • Understand more about your cultural heritage • Better relationships with friends and family • Access cultural memory through pageantry, ritual • Communicate norms, beliefs • Establish a legacy • Remember things you've forgotten | | <p><u>IDENTITY FORMATION</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced sense of self; who I am, how I fit in • Improved self-confidence, direction, focus • Sense of accomplishment, achievement, pride • Self-esteem, self-worth, dignity |

Your space would be transformed, so the experience has aesthetic value. This particular experience also taps into a set of socio-cultural values because of the historic references. There may even be political values going on here. What other values might be possible, from the viewpoint of the observer. How would the values change if you considered the viewpoint of the performers? How would the value system change if the sculpture was bronze, and not human?



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Example 4: Performing with a Symphony

This is an example of Interpretive Arts Participation. If you were the woman playing the violin in the orchestra pictured below, what value system surrounds this activity?

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p><u>COGNITIVE</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lengthen attention span • Learn to make choices • Activate the imagination • Connect ideas • Improve analytical skills • Improve communication skills | <p><u>SPIRITUAL</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Escape, take a journey • Express/strengthen your faith • Renew, replenish energy; nourish the soul • Transformation/out-of-body experience | <p><u>AESTHETIC</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transform a space into something new or better • See more aesthetic value in your surroundings, ordinary objects • Evolve your aesthetic sensibilities • Awaken new creative outlets in others |
| <p><u>POLITICAL</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic engagement; political dialogue • Get exposed to new ideas and opposing viewpoints • Clarify your own values • Transfer values to your children |  | <p><u>PHYSICAL</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise/stay fit • Sensory pleasure, stimulation • Sexual arousal • Relax, de-stress • Acquire new technical skills • Improved coordination, movement skills • Improved body image • Gain a sense of possibility for human capacity |
| <p><u>SOCIO-CULTURAL</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic/community pride • A sense of place; belonging • Learn about other cultures • Understand more about your cultural heritage • Better relationships with friends and family • Access cultural memory through pageantry, ritual • Communicate norms, beliefs • Establish a legacy • Remember things you've forgotten | <p><u>IDENTITY FORMATION</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced sense of self; who I am, how I fit in • Improved self-confidence, direction, focus • Sense of accomplishment, achievement, pride • Self-esteem, self-worth, dignity | <p><u>EMOTIONAL</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process emotions, get in touch with your feelings • Empathize with others • Relive your childhood • Have fun, feel happy • Be comforted, take solace • Be disturbed |

One might imagine a set of emotional and cognitive values, but also physical and other values.

How would the value system be different if you were the photographer taking this picture?



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Example 5: Seeing a Broadway Show

Here is a classic example of Observational Arts Participation, using one of the most popular forms of live entertainment that includes music, theater and dance (photo credit: *Wicked*). What value system surrounds this arts experience?

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| <p>COGNITIVE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lengthen attention span • Learn to make choices • Activate the imagination • Connect Ideas • Improve analytical skills • Improve communication skills | <p>SPIRITUAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Escape, take a journey • Express/strengthen your faith • Renew, replenish energy; nourish the soul • Transformation/out-of-body experience | <p>AESTHETIC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transform a space into something new or better • See more aesthetic value in your surroundings, ordinary objects • Evolve your aesthetic sensibilities • Awaken new creative outlets in others |
| <p>POLITICAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic engagement; political dialogue • Get exposed to new ideas and opposing viewpoints • Clarify your own values • Transfer values to your children |  | <p>PHYSICAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise/stay fit • Sensory pleasure, stimulation • Sexual arousal • Relax, de-stress • Acquire new technical skills • Improved coordination, movement skills • Improved body image • Gain a sense of possibility for human capacity |
| <p>SOCIO-CULTURAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic/community pride • A sense of place; belonging • Learn about other cultures • Understand more about your cultural heritage • Better relationships with friends and family • Access cultural memory through pageantry, ritual • Communicate norms, beliefs • Establish a legacy • Remember things you've forgotten | | <p>IDENTITY FORMATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced sense of self; who I am, how I fit in • Improved self-confidence, direction, focus • Sense of accomplishment, achievement, pride • Self-esteem, self-worth, dignity |

Before the show there is a great deal of anticipation in the audience. People are dressed up. Many of the patrons have already been to dinner. What value has already happened, before the show even starts?

Judging from the thunderous applause at the end of the show, it seems that the participants were pleased with their experience, but why? As they file out of the theater, how are people different compared to when they arrived?



Summary: Five Strategies for Adding Value

The Value Framework can be useful in stimulating discussion about how consumers experience a wide variety of arts activities. Picture your organization's activities in the middle of the Value Framework, and talk about what benefits people get from participating. Make a case for your programs using the Value Framework. Then, think about what additional values you can deliver to your constituents. To summarize, five strategies for increasing participation are suggested by the Value Framework:

1. Paint a better picture. Gain a better sense of the values people derive from your programs, and do a better job of selling people on the value, not just the art. In other words, be a better advocate for your programs, and use values-based promotions to convince people that your programs are a good investment of time and money.
2. Improve access to your programs by reducing or removing inhibitors to participation (logistical, financial, social). Or, use inducements to lower the decision threshold or create new value propositions (e.g., bring a friend for half-price).
3. Enhance the proposition. In other words, layer on "value added" features that tap into additional value sets. First, you must consider what additional values are possible by adding features to your existing programs (e.g., supertitles at the opera). For example, how could you add political value to a theater production?
4. Create relevance at new levels. Before people make a decision to participate in a given arts activity, it must successfully pass at least one relevance test, and probably two or three. In hierarchical order, the seven levels of relevance identified in the Values Study are:
 - Relevance of the specific work(s) of art (e.g., "I love Brahms's 3rd Symphony")
 - Relevance of the artist(s) ("I'll go see any Matisse exhibit")
 - Relevance of the genre, idiom, medium or discipline ("Gilbert and Sullivan is my cup of tea")
 - Relevance of the institution presenting the art ("Artspace always does provocative exhibitions")
 - Relevance of the activity category ("It's important to be exposed to great art")
 - Social relevance ("My friends are involved in drumming circles")
 - Cultural relevance (i.e., the activity is consistent with my cultural identity)
5. Innovate programs that creatively tap into new veins of value. Be proactive about responding to your community's needs for different kinds of value. Design new programs and partnerships with other organizations in your community that fill specific value needs (e.g., the healing of racial tensions).