

AN INITIATIVE OF THE
ARTHUR M. BLANK FAMILY FOUNDATION





“Being in a room with arts organizations that vary in size and art form has allowed us to discover that we all have similar goals and challenges, and that we can help each other by sharing information and ideas.”

Tricia Ekholm, Director of Marketing, Atlanta Ballet



The Audience Building Roundtable starts with the story of arts research that did not sit on a shelf. When a study from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) revealed that 31 million Americans – 13% of all adults - want to attend the arts but never get to the show, The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation took action. The Foundation thought it was doable to move those adults closer to arts engagement – through empathy for the cultural and logistical barriers that derail these wanna-be attendees. At the same time, the Foundation understood that retaining existing audiences was problematic for arts and culture organizations. With more than 80% of audiences attending one time and not returning, what could arts and culture organizations do to change this circumstance?

The Foundation launched the Audience Building Roundtable, a forum of leaders from 48 arts and culture nonprofits, to encourage arts and culture organizations to focus on and respond to audience interests. The goal is two-fold: new audiences and deeper relationships with existing audiences for each of the member organizations participating in the Audience Building Roundtable.

“We’re learning from each other, collaborating in new ways and challenging ourselves to break down barriers to participation in theater, music, dance and the visual arts.”

Jessica Boatright,
Marketing Director, Alliance Theatre



"The Roundtable has proven incredibly valuable at creating a space to problem solve collaboratively, and really take apart the challenges that all arts organizations are facing. We tackle nuts-and-bolts skills and tools."

Brad Pilcher, Associate Director,
Atlanta Jewish Film Festival



At monthly meetings, Roundtable members hear about audience growth and retention strategies from arts and marketing experts and discuss implications of these and their own implementation strategies in peer-group discussions. Risk-taking is encouraged through small technical assistance grants, as well as a few larger grants that explore innovative ways to reach and deepen relationships with audiences. Other support, including consulting and conference scholarships, provides additional tools for member organizations. Members report on progress to each other on grant-supported activity at monthly meetings, as well as in blogs, newsletters, and podcasts that are maintained on a central website.

The Audience Building Roundtable has fostered a new level of cooperation and collaboration among the member organizations. Interaction outside of Roundtable meetings, sharing of audience data, and the free-flow of audience-building strategies that work (and don't work) has helped Roundtable members *to put audiences where they belong: in the center of it all.*





After two years of participation, member organizations believe they are learning more and have greater confidence in their ability to try new ideas since before their participation in the Roundtable. 60% strongly agree that they have a broad awareness of audience-building strategies; this is significant in comparison to their appraisals of where they were before they participated in the Roundtable (only 4% strongly agree they had broad awareness of these strategies at that earlier point).

28% believe they know how to use data to retain and grow audiences – an area where arts organizations typically express doubt. None believed they could have said this about themselves before being a part of the Roundtable. 71% of Roundtable member organizations who made an investment in audience building say it involved a new marketing strategy, compared to 34% among a national sample of arts managers.

Roundtable member organizations are also more likely than arts managers nationally to prioritize collecting data to inform fundraising and experimentation with new pricing models.

Roundtable members are also more likely to report a better financial result from their investments than their peers at the national level.

"We are all learning a great deal from each other. We may turn out to be our own best resource!"

Amy Miller, Executive Director
Atlanta Celebrates Photography



“The Audience Building Roundtable has quickly become the most important forum to engage with other arts leaders in the region. Roundtable members share ideas with each other, collaborate on a diverse range of projects and learn new strategies from the best in the field. After every, and I mean EVERY SINGLE, Roundtable meeting we are able to incorporate new actionable tactics into the Actor’s Express marketing strategy. The foundation’s willingness to explore and support new ideas ... is a unique model that should be followed in communities across the country.”

Alex Scollon, Actor’s Express

AUDIENCE BUILDING ROUNDTABLE MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

Actor's Express	Conyers Rockdale Council for the Arts	Museum of Design Atlanta (MODA)
Alliance Theatre	CORE Performance Company	National Black Arts Festival
APEX Museum	Dad's Garage	Out of Hand Theatre
Atlanta Ballet	Dance Canvas	Rialto Center for the Arts at Georgia State University
Atlanta Celebrates Photography	DeKalb Symphony Orchestra	Serenbe Institute for Art, Culture & the Environment
Atlanta Chamber Players	Earl Smith Strand Theater	Serenbe Playhouse
Atlanta Contemporary Art Center	Falany Performing Arts Center	7 Stages Theatre
Atlanta Jewish Film Festival	Ferst Center for the Arts at Georgia Tech	Shakespeare Tavern
Atlanta Lyric Theatre	Flux Projects	Southeast Fiber Arts Alliance
Atlanta Master Chorale	Georgia Ballet	Spivey Hall at Clayton State University
Atlanta Opera	Georgia Ensemble Theatre	Springer Opera House
Atlanta Radio Theatre Company	Georgia Symphony Orchestra	Synchronicity Theatre
Atlanta Symphony Orchestra	Giwayen Mata	Theatrical Outfit
Aurora Theatre	High Museum of Art	True Colors Theatre Company
Ballethnic Dance Company	Horizon Theatre	
Breman Museum	The Michael O'Neal Singers	
Children's Museum of Atlanta	Moving in the Spirit	

The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation welcomes inquiries about the Audience Building Roundtable from nonprofit arts and culture organizations, foundations that support arts and culture organizations, and community arts collaboratives interested in advancing their audience-building work. For more information, send an email: info@audiencebuildingroundtable.org, or visit www.audiencebuildingroundtable.org.



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