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Centring the audience: attitudes and behaviours in Australian arts organisations

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ABSTRACT

Many arts organisations seek to increase the diversity of their audiences. Recent literature suggests that this requires organisations to interrogate and change their ways of operating. This is a fundamental shift for a sector that has long considered the goal of diversifying audiences as a problem external to the organisation. Responding to this discrepancy, this article compares attitudes and behaviours among workers in arts organisations, to identify whether staff see the need to make change and practise the behaviours required. It identifies and uses three organisational capabilities – ‘dynamic capabilities’, ‘social networks’ and ‘business improvement processes’ – to frame an analysis of a national survey of arts workers. Through our analysis of this survey, we find that programming is an area of organisational practice that arts organisations are least prepared to change, that artworkers perceive the value of evaluation to the organisation as limited, and that, over all, behaviours lag behind attitudes. We conclude that there is more interest in actions to diversify audiences amongst artworkers than are currently embedded into organisational processes, but less confidence in such actions when they encroach on artistic programming.

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1. Introduction

A lack of demographic diversity among the audiences for publicly funded arts organisations is a problem for the sustainability and relevance of an arts sector that works to demonstrate its public and social value. Across much of the western world, the arts sector has significant opportunities to build new audiences, particularly in the light of findings that certain groups have lower levels of attendance than the rest of the population (Jancovich 2011; Ostrower 2005). Australian audiences have been slow to recover from COVID, especially in light of the recent cost-of-living crisis (Creative Australia 2023a), and while Australians have a strong interest in First Nations and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) arts and culture, 39% of First Nations, and 31% of CALD respondents report feeling as though arts and culture in Australia is ‘not for them’ (Creative Australia 2023b). People with a disability are less likely to attend an arts event than other Australians (Creative Australia 2023c). The goal of enhancing audience/public engagement is now commonplace among arts organisations and projects. The priorities of public policies provide impetus for this work. The national cultural policy, *Revive: A place for every story, a story for every place*, for example,

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has as a core principle: 'All Australians, regardless of language, literacy, geography, age, or education, have the opportunity to access and participate in arts and culture' (Commonwealth of Australia 2023, 19).

A growing understanding about how to change the social profile of arts audiences involves the organisation critically reviewing and developing internal structures and systems (Glow, Kershaw, and Reason 2021; Harlow 2014; Lindelof 2015). Audience diversification cannot be achieved by simply repackaging an existing arts product. Rather, arts organisations need to develop a strategic approach that involves transforming the arts organisation itself (Ostrower 2005). The workforces in arts organisations themselves tend to lack demographic diversity, following lines of privilege and exclusion in society generally so that white, middle-class, urban staff predominate, particularly in more senior positions (Ali and Byrne 2022; Brook, O'Brien, and Taylor 2020; O'Brien, Rees, and Taylor 2022; Vincent and Coles 2023). However, while greater workforce diversity is important to achieving audience diversity and ensuring that opportunities for creative industries work are available to a wide range of people, it is not on its own a sufficient means by which to achieve the business case for greater audience diversity (Bleijenbergh, Peters, and Poutsma 2010). Strategic work, particularly integrating an understanding of the organisation's target audiences into their focus on the artistic product, is also important.

This article investigates the extent of transformations that arts organisations have made to increase their audience diversity by taking on this strategic work. It is based on a larger study, in which we worked with Creative Australia (the Australian Government's principal arts investment and advisory body), state government arts bodies and the peak bodies/professional associations that support the publicly funded arts sectors in Australia to research audience diversity. This project set out to do two things. The first was to examine the preparedness of funded organisations to make organisational changes in order to increase the diversity of their audiences, and the second was to undertake participatory research that assisted organisational efforts to embed change behaviours. Here, we use a national survey of publicly funded arts and cultural organisations across Australia that was developed for the first stage of this larger research project. The organisations that participated in this survey represented a diverse range of art forms, from small to large, across all states and territories, and in both regional and metropolitan areas. The survey asked questions about the arts organisations' practices and the beliefs of its workers about how their organisation operates.

This article begins with a brief review of scholarship on the attitudes and behaviours of people working in the arts, the relationships between them, and the ways that those attitudes and behaviours inform the practice within organisations themselves. It then discusses three aspects of organisational behaviour, or capabilities (Greenwood, Hinings, and Ames 2021), and sets out the background for our survey design, implementation, and analysis. We then demonstrate the extent to which these three aspects of organisational capabilities are evident in arts organisations in Australia. Finally, we conclude by presenting recommendations based on these findings.

1.1. Attitudes and behaviours

If organisations are to effectively embed audience diversification activity, this requires positive attitudes towards this same activity, and behaviour that activates these attitudes. However, neither of these is guaranteed, and one does not entail the other. In this section, we set out our understandings of the two terms, and review attitudes and behaviours with respect to audience diversification in the arts. While in the context of this study, behaviour is relatively easily defined as organisational actions and practices, the definition of attitude requires more attention.

In defining an attitude as a 'behaviour pattern' (1934, 230), LaPiere notes that assessing attitude in response to an entirely symbolic situation provides 'no reassurance' that the individual being asked will do what they say they will do (1934, 236). Individuals may believe that one course of action is the best or correct course (attitude), especially when presented with a hypothetical scenario, but take another course entirely (behaviour) when faced with the complex and often competing demands of

a real scenario. LaPiere's observation that attitude is a poor predictor of behaviour has led to a large volume of work theorising the relationship between attitude and behaviour and identifying methods to assess it (Ajzen 2005; Dockery and Bedeian 1989; Fishbein and Ajzen 2010; Sample and Warland 1973; Wicker 1969). Fishbein proposes three factors which influence whether our actions match our attitudes: 'attitudes towards the behaviour', 'normative beliefs', and 'motivation to comply with the norms' (in Wicker 1969, 74). Attitudes towards the behaviour refer to the individual understanding and evaluating any consequences; normative beliefs cover personal and societal beliefs that affect a set of circumstances, all of which are mediated by 'the motivation to comply with the norm, that is [their] desire, or lack of desire, to do what [they] think [they] should do' (Fishbein in Wicker 1969, 74). Wicker proposes additional influences: competing motives, abilities (social, verbal, and intellectual), level of activity, presence (perceived or actual) of other people, prescriptions of behaviour, alternative behaviours available, consequences of action, and the specificity of the attitude objects (1969, 69). While many of these are more relevant to individual attitudes and behaviour (e.g. verbal abilities), others apply also to organisational behaviour, such as competing motives and consequences of action. While a discrepancy between attitude and behaviour emerged as a significant finding of the research, it is also important to establish a baseline of how the discrepancies between attitudes and behaviours are understood in the arts.

Locating a rhetorical shift in the way senior (male) leaders frame diversity, Brook, O'Brien, and Taylor identify that while there has been a change in attitudes towards diversity and inclusion in the UK arts sector, behaviours have not shifted in the same way, demonstrating 'a considerable distance between their rhetoric and their understanding of how occupations need to change' (2021, 500). Cancellieri and Turrini assert that 'artistic directors' disposition towards avant-garde works that challenge audience tastes will be tempered when the occupancy rate or the box office is calling the tune, even though avant-garde works further the discipline and are often seen as important by artistic teams' (2016, 27). This is a reflection on the economics of creative production, 'wherein it faces commercial pressure to avoid controversy in favour of the box office' (Eckersall and Grehan 2014, 1), and an example of the influence of 'normative beliefs' (in this case, perceptions of audience taste shaped by attenders). A disconnection between attitudes and behaviours can also be seen in arts managers' perceptions of the challenges facing their organisations and the skills they recruit for, demonstrating the sector's adherence to institutional norms (Kershaw, Glow, and Goodwin 2022). The discrepancy in attitudes and behaviour highlights the difference between performative and operational activism (Lynch 2019). In framing the relationship between attitudes and behaviours in an arts setting through Wickers' additional influences, a series of exo- and endogenous factors is at play: strategic priorities of an organisation, the skillsets, resources and time of staff members, and the needs and priorities of boards and management.

When we consider that the attitudes of arts and cultural workers are more aligned with pursuing an inclusion and diversification agenda than the larger community (McAndrew, O'Brien, and Taylor 2019), discrepancies between the attitudes and behaviours of arts and cultural workers are possibly amplified. Together, these issues highlight the challenges of audience diversification: while individuals and organisations might express a commitment to audience diversification, this does not consistently translate into behaviour.

1.2. Capabilities

We have started this background section by reviewing what organisations, and individuals within those organisations, *want to do* (attitudes) and *are in fact doing* (behaviours). An organisation that does not want to increase the diversity of its audience is unlikely to do so. However, when an organisation is not undertaking work to increase the diversity of its audience, this may be because it does not want to, or because it cannot: because it lacks the organisational capabilities to do so.

In this section, we lay out our approach to organisational capabilities, by setting out the different capabilities that are necessary for effective audience diversification work. These capabilities are

intangible and strategic assets that result from the collective skills, abilities, and expertise held by an organisation. We propose that three organisational capabilities that underpin audience-centric practice: dynamic capabilities, social networking, and business improvement processes.

1.2.1. Dynamic capabilities

Dynamic capabilities are the skills and attributes that enable an organisation to break from traditional ways of working to respond to changes in its operating environment and create new opportunities (Ambrosini and Bowman 2009; den Hertog, van der Aa, and de Jong 2010; Kachouie, Mavondob, and Ambrosini 2024; Maghzi et al. 2022). Audience-centric practice requires a desire for change (attitude) that is strong enough for the organisation to shift away from (behaviour) existing routines and traditional ways of operating (Greenwood, Suddaby, and Hinings 2002). The professional nature of work in the arts, characterised by the ubiquity of university training and membership of professional associations, increases the normative pressure placed on organisations and their staff (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). A recent study of the attitudes of arts workers in secure positions towards issues of access to career progression suggests 'that awareness of issues of access to the [cultural and creative industries] have not got through to this section of people'. The authors conclude that 'It is difficult to see where the impetus for the situation to change will come from' (M. Taylor and O'Brien 2017, 43–44). Identifying the need for change is an early step in shaping institutional entrepreneurs who demonstrate agency in breaking away from expectations about the way they work (Battilana, Leca, and Boxenbaum 2009).

Organisations can be both reactive and proactive in their use of dynamic capabilities (Maghzi et al. 2022). The dynamic capability to diversify audiences requires multidisciplinary project teams operating within a collaborative work environment and with the support of senior management (den Hertog, van der Aa, and de Jong 2010). Empowering leadership styles, which influence employees by encouraging self-directed action to anticipate or initiate workplace changes, are particularly valuable (Martin, Liao, and Campbell 2013). So too is visionary leadership, which motivates staff and shapes organisational practice (C. M. Taylor, Cornelius, and Colvin 2014). Organisation leaders, such as artistic directors, who appreciate the vitality that comes with renewed leadership help to ensure the organisation maintains artistic and audience currency (Hands 2024).

Product development – the ability to develop and manage products and service offerings according to internal goals, customer needs, and competitors' offerings – is challenging not only in the arts and is a characteristic of organisations with a high level of dynamic capability (Kachouie, Mavondob, and Ambrosini 2024). An arts organisation's programming strategies, as an example of product development, are indicative of its dynamic capabilities. Audience-centric practice requires the integration of product- and target-led approaches to arts marketing (Hill et al. 2018). Importantly, it is not sufficient to take an exclusively product-led approach, that is to market a product that has been formed without a market in mind. The organisational change needed to diversify audiences is more fundamental than simply adjusting the packaging and presentation of traditional arts offerings (Kawashima 2006; Moffat and Turpin 2018). Instead, it requires a reassessment of the organisation's core product in light of a new target audience, but without compromising artistic quality (Kawashima 2006); an organisation needs to balance its programming strategies against its assessment of its audiences. Inherent in this task are changes to the professional role of arts workers and the nature of their practice (Battilana, Leca, and Boxenbaum 2009; den Hertog, van der Aa, and de Jong 2010; DiMaggio and Powell 1983). For example, Mandel found that 'only when the directors who are responsible for artistic operations (rather than marketing or education managers) believe that working with new audiences is artistically worthwhile that they will agree to these kinds of programs' (2019, 127).

1.2.2. Social networking

The second capability we identify that organisations require to diversify their audiences is social networking. Social networking skills enable organisations to gain valuable knowledge and ideas

from outside their organisation (Inkpen and Tsang 2016; Kwon and Adler 2014). Being able to participate in social networks and form positive relationships with individuals and groups outside the arts organisation provides it with access to desirable resources including goodwill (Adler and Kwon 2002), knowledge transfer (Argote and Fahrenkopf 2016; Inkpen and Tsang 2005) and innovation (Carnabuci and Diószeg 2015; De Clercq, Thongpapanl, and Dimov 2009).

Social networking skills are necessary for organisations to learn about, understand, and relate to new audiences they seek to attract to their activities. This requires identifying the target audience, and then working to understand and appeal to their core values and interests (Bernstein 2006; Boorsma 2006). Target-led approaches have traditionally been the focus of initiatives that aim to appeal to non-traditional arts audiences and increase social inclusion (Evans 2016; Kawashima 2006). Social networking skills are critical, because of the complexity of the notion of 'community' and the ways in which a target audience identifies. Modern use of the term community assumes its universal value; the concept has been described as a powerful symbol of goodness, integrity, and unity (Bauman 2001) and as 'warmly persuasive' (Williams 1976 cited in Bennett 1998, 397). Defining an audience or community according to 'culture' or identity is, however, not straightforward, as it presupposes a community that is not only homogeneous but also static (Gunew 1994; Onciul 2013). Any individual will have multiple – even conflicting – community allegiances (Onciul 2013). It is important to be aware that diversity exists both between and within communities (Fouseki and Smith 2013).

The complex nature of identity and culture also requires careful attention to an audience's core values, lifestyles, and interests (Bernstein 2006; Boorsma 2006). In particular, it requires organisations to understand the barriers to participation that are specific to the target audience and the nature of the cultural product the arts organisation is offering.

1.2.3. Business improvement processes

The capability 'business improvement processes' refers to the fact that to diversify audiences across the activities of the arts organisation, the organisation needs to embed particular processes as a strategic commitment within their organisational priorities (Boorsma and Chiaravallot 2010; Iglesias, Sauquet, and Montaña 2011; Walmsley 2016). Walmsley (2016) identifies the paradigm shift in arts marketing from traditional consumer-led approaches to audience engagement, and a corresponding adoption of long-term relational approaches to audiences over short-term tactical activities. To systematically embed audience diversity as a priority throughout the organisation and shape business improvement processes around this priority addresses the point that Verplanken and Orbell make that habit often trumps intention, becoming 'default behavior' (2022, 338); illustrating the conflict that exists between prevailing attitudes and actual behaviour in an organisation. Changing the social profile of audiences requires arts organisations to alter the expectations and routines that shape their work. An obstacle to this change is what Ambrosini and Bowman call 'core rigidities,' which are organisational approaches that 'inhibit development, generate inertia and stifle innovation' (2009, 32). Changing habits and shifting core rigidities require sustained effort across the organisation. The stimulus for these changes may be practice-driven (Smets, Morris, and Greenwood 2012) or a process whereby new modes of operating are theorised and diffused across the field (Greenwood, Suddaby, and Hinings 2002). This shift also requires changes to the staffing and management of arts organisations (Kershaw, Glow, and Goodwin 2022).

Dynamic organisations are committed to evaluation and reflective practice because tasks can be 'performed more effectively and efficiently as an outcome of experimentation, reflecting on failure and success' (Ambrosini and Bowman 2009, 35). Helfat et al. (2007) identify that the capacity for change is demonstrated by organisations that can change the basis of their processes and resources, including knowledge, in response to changes in the environment: these are organisations that are able to change their behaviour, as prevailing attitudes shift and change. Boorsma and Chiaravallot (2010) emphasise a relational view of the arts and the need to attend to both audiences and artistic vision in the evaluation of arts organisations. They highlight innovation and learning performance

indicators to ensure arts organisations make continual improvements to their offerings and processes. A common shortfall of evaluation and reflective practice in publicly funded organisations is their use to demonstrate public value and advocate to funding bodies, rather than influence internal processes and decision-making (Hartley et al. 2015; Lee, Oakley, and Naylor 2011).

1.2.4. Goals

We can summarise the background of the project as follows. Diversification of arts audiences is a major priority for arts audiences, funders, and governments, but existing efforts have had, at best, mixed success in developing the hoped-for transformations. First, this reflects challenges with the gulf between the attitudes and the behaviours of arts organisations, where concerns about inequalities in both audiences and workforces have not consistently translated into action. Second, where concerns have translated into action, this has not always been an effective action; indeed, action cannot be effective without the appropriate organisational capacities.

This takes us to our project. The next section outlines the context for our research, the broader project we delivered, and the specific analysis that we undertook for this article. In doing so, we illustrate how the organisational capabilities described above emerged as a key focus, and how our research design allowed us to analyse organisational capabilities from a range of perspectives.

2. Research design

2.1. Research process

The first stage of the larger research project, discussed in this article, was based on a survey designed to assess how prepared arts organisations were to make organisational change in order to increase the diversity of their audiences. This research was undertaken in partnership with Creative Australia (who also partially funded the project), all state/territory government arts bodies, and the peak bodies that support the publicly funded arts sectors in Australia.¹ The academic researchers were responsible for the design and conduct of the research, while the project partners supported its implementation and the dissemination of its findings. The involvement of these government and industry bodies was motivated by the goal of increasing the sector's capacity to diversify audiences. It included distributing a call for arts organisations to participate in the research and providing feedback about the proposed research process, timeframes, and readability of the survey. Collection methods ensured that the organisations and people who took part in the survey were anonymous from all parties. The research team provided two reports to the partner organisations over the course of the project.

The project partners distributed a call to organisations to participate in a survey through their lists of funded organisations and memberships. Organisations were eligible to be part of the survey if they received public funds and produced or programmed artistic or cultural work. Each participating organisation received a unique link to circulate the survey to staff and board members. Responses from organisations, and individual staff members within them who participated in the survey, remained anonymous to all stakeholders in the project.² From the 1452 invited organisations, staff from 136 organisations responded to the questionnaire. Very few questions were mandatory, reflecting an awareness that not all individuals working in an organisation are across all activities within it. Not all respondents completed the survey in full, so some responses could not be classified, while other respondents could be classified for some, but not all, categories. In total, 1012 respondents completed at least one of the two major sections of the survey. A total of 854 answered sufficient questions to be classified as Leaders, Adaptors, or Avoiders on at least one task, as described below. We use the data set of 854 individuals here for our analysis.

The project was originally designed to launch during 2021, but was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Arts organisations and funders were under unprecedented pressure, and we judged that people's ability to complete the survey would be heavily affected. For this reason, the launch was

postponed. We originally approached organisations to participate in March 2022, with invitations to individuals to be circulated by these organisations and disseminated in three tranches between May and October 2022, with reminders sent to organisations during that period. This period included a federal election on 21 May 2022; we considered delaying the launch and the follow-up rounds of invitations but concluded that the disruption would be manageable.

This recruitment method ensured good coverage from across the publicly funded Australian arts sector but excluded the commercial sector. The voluntary nature of participation also means that the survey results may be skewed towards better resourced organisations. In an era where workloads and commitments for arts workers are particularly tight, it is likely that poorly resourced institutions are less well represented. Due to our recruitment and reporting methods we cannot verify this. While benchmarking against national figures is challenging due to the lack of alignment between our recruitment criteria and occupational and industrial codes, if we benchmark against 2021 Census data based on the categories 'Museum Operation' (9,889), 'Performing Arts Operation' (6,218), and 'Performing Arts Venue Operation' (4,810) (Eltham and O'Connor 2024, 36), our sample represents around 4% of people working in all these sectors, noting, however, that the Census data is not restricted to publicly funded organisations.

2.2. Questionnaire design

The research approach was initially based on Glow, Kershaw, and Reason's (2021) organisational change model. This model deploys eight tasks that must be embedded within organisations if their audiences are to become more diverse (see Figure A1). This set of tasks is based on research in both Australia and the UK, which studied different types of arts organisations, and covers a wide range of activity from relevant institutions. Existing research analysing this model shows that organisational preparedness and commitment to audience diversification is mixed: there are some tasks, such as recognising the need for change, where organisational progress is more significant, while there are others where their progress is limited. The framework classifies organisations as 'leaders,' 'avoiders,' and 'adaptors' based on their activity.

To implement this model, our process was as follows. First, we developed a questionnaire for staff at Australian arts organisations to assess their commitment to organisational change for the purpose of diversifying audiences, based on the tasks in question. We analysed the survey data through two lenses. Having designed the questionnaire based on the eight-task model, we undertook analysis both on the foundation of these same tasks, but also on the basis of the three organisational capabilities described in section 5.2 'dynamic capabilities,' 'social networking,' and 'business improvement processes.' This approach allowed us to assess progress in the practice of audience diversification.

The questionnaire comprised four parts. Part one collected data about the individual completing the survey, such as the level of seniority held in the organisation and the department in which they worked. We used answers to these questions to limit subsequent question sets to individuals in roles in a position to answer them. Part two used a series of multiple-choice questions about the organisation's behaviour and actions in relation to audience diversification. These questions asked respondents to reflect on a specific, recent activity that was part of the organisation's core program, as opposed to ancillary programming such as education or outreach. This focus was intended to increase the likelihood that their responses reflected actual rather than ideal behaviour.

To examine the attitudes the respondents held towards the work required for diversification, part three presented them with a series of statements, in a random order, with 0–10 scales asking for level of agreement. Some questions required specific knowledge of the organisation to answer and so were only presented to those respondents in more senior roles. Finally, in part four, all participants were asked questions about the barriers to and drivers of organisations' abilities to undertake audience diversification work.

Other than the first part, which was used to inform which questions each respondent received, the questionnaire was designed to assess organisational capacity for audience diversity with respect to the eight-task model of audience development. Questions in relation to each task were embedded throughout the different sections, in order to assess both institutional attitudes, and existing institutional commitment, to audience diversification. The survey underwent a cultural safety audit by a First Nations theatre professional, and an audit of its compliance with the main software types used by readers with visual impairments.

The survey was delivered through the online survey platform Qualtrics, via Deakin's University-branded set of pages reinforcing the research's independence from the funders and the Australian arts sector more generally. The median time to completion was 21 min. A broader report outlining the methods involved and some high-level results, including some summary of how results varied by state and territory and by artform, can be found in Glow et al. (2022).

3. Results

Our analysis addresses three key areas of organisational capability: dynamic capabilities, social networking, and business improvement processes. Here, we focus on a particular dimension of each of these, by highlighting an individual task (from the Glow, Kershaw, and Reason eight-task model) associated with each area.

We illustrate each of these areas of organisational capacity by showing the survey results from the questions associated with three tasks: programming is responsive to target audience (dynamic capability), developing relationships with the target audience (social networking), and evaluation and reflective practice (business improvement). We have selected these as they are at the heart of challenges with audience development: openness to contributions to programming beyond the walls of the institutions, openness to collaboration with organisations and individuals beyond those same walls, and openness to reflections once a programme of work has been completed, once again drawing in expertise beyond the walls, with a sincere commitment to this expertise being embedded long term.

Across these questions, we aim to highlight where there may be particular dimensions in which practice is effective, as well as dimensions for which challenges are widespread. In drawing attention to each of the individual items within these areas of organisational capacity, rather than addressing organisational capacities as monolithic, we aim to make visible where opportunities for transformation might lie. We present results with reference to the 'leader,' 'avoider,' and 'adaptor' categories, while recognising that a given response to a question may not reflect the overall organisational capacity, rather individual dimensions of that capacity.

3.1. *Dynamic capabilities*

Figure 1 summarises the answers to questions addressing dynamic capabilities and programming. Our survey asked one behavioural question about the organisation's programming in relation to the specific activity the respondent had been asked to identify, and three attitudinal questions about programming generally. The behavioural question was 'Who were the people mainly responsible for determining the core activity?' (i.e. the programmed activity the arts worker had earlier identified as the focus of 'core activity' questions) and respondents were asked to select from a list all that applied. This question was motivated by an interest in organisational commitment to audience diversification, and an understanding that change cannot come from within the organisation alone. We describe 'Leader' behaviour as those responses which indicated their organisation relied on a range of people, including not just the programming team or artistic director, but also collaborators outside the organisation and particularly community members and/or representatives of the target audience. On the other extreme, where respondents nominated only the programming team and/or artistic director or did not know the answer, we classified the behaviour as 'Avoider.'

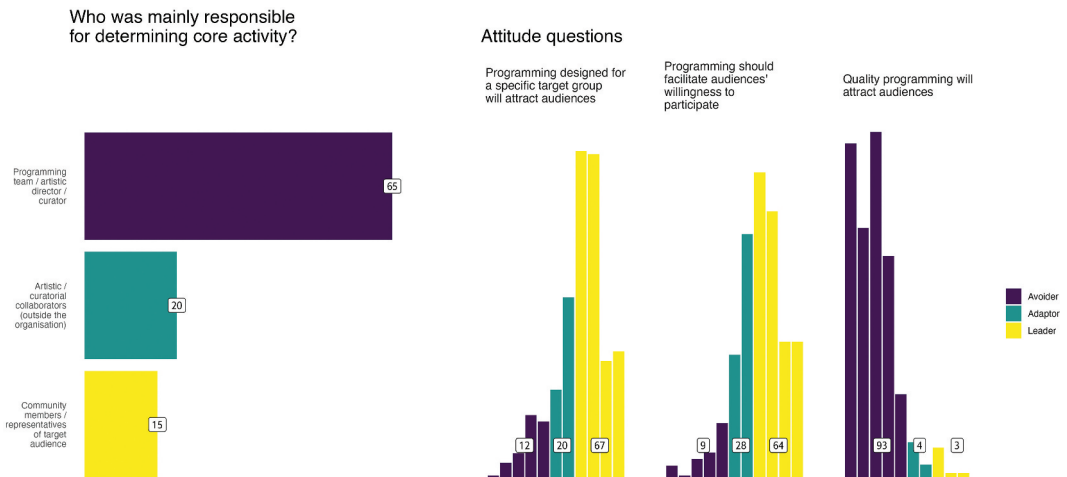


Figure 1. Responses to questions about programming.

This question was contrived to identify *ambitious* behaviour, described as *leader* – we anticipated that few respondents would report that community members (alongside organisational staff) were ‘mainly responsible’ for programming. Indeed, only 15% of respondents stated that community members or any other representatives of the target audience shared responsibility for the core activity; another 20% stated that it was artistic or curatorial collaborators from outside the organisation. For most organisations, decisions about programming are made exclusively by the artistic team. As this question is asked of all employees, regardless of their role or level of seniority, it is likely that some responses are guesswork. However, this is unlikely to be the case for all respondents. This leaning towards a restricted level of input into programming reflects the current professional norms of the arts sector, whereby artistic programming is largely delivered by a small programming team (Caut 2010; Sorjonen 2011).

The survey also asked attitudinal questions about programming decisions. The first asked for a level of agreement with the statement: ‘Programming designed for a specific target group will attract audiences.’ A significant majority of respondents agreed with the statement, with 67% showing substantial agreement (Leader) and 20% moderate agreement (Adaptor). The second attitudinal question asked for a level of agreement with the statement that ‘Programming should facilitate the audience’s willingness to participate,’ to which 64% showed substantial agreement (Leader) and 28% moderate agreement (Adaptor). However, the most common responses to these questions were between 6 and 8 in the scale, not higher. This suggests that even where attitudes towards putting audiences at the forefront of programming are positive, they are only cautiously so.

The third attitudinal question – ‘Quality programming will attract audiences’ was reverse-coded. This question is based on the point that quality programming alone does not attract audiences unless the programming responds to the audience’s assessment of ‘quality’ (Kawashima 2006). Ninety-three per cent of responses offered a score of at least 6 out of 10 to this question, suggesting Avoider attitudes, and only 3% showing little agreement (Leader). The strength of responses to this question can be contrasted with the more lukewarm responses to the positive statements about programming.

Collectively, these questions about programming elicited the most responses classified as Avoider. Of the four questions on programming, two had majorities of respondents classified as Avoiders, and two had majorities of respondents classified as Leaders. However, on the two items where Leaders were in the majority, they were only cautiously so; respondents were far more

enthusiastic about the reverse-coded question. Taken together, we can see that the crucial issues shaping the ability to make changes to programming with the goal of diversifying audiences are 1. how wide is the range of people responsible for programming, and 2. attitudes towards the pre-eminence of 'quality programming' and what it requires. This analysis suggests that programming is an aspect of organisational practice in which dynamic capability represents a great challenge for organisations.

3.2. Social networking

Here, we highlight responses to four questions about audience development: one about behaviour, and three about attitudes, summarised in [Figure 2](#). We asked whether social networks beyond the organisation and the professional arts sector were valued and encouraged because we were looking for the organisations' efforts to understand people who do not currently attend. Arts workers tend to be drawn from a narrow field, often with well-developed networks between fellow arts workers; this is unsurprising as work is often secured as a result of 'who you know' ([Bridgstock 2011](#)). This behaviour helps to 'ensure that the narrow class basis of the sector is replicated inter-generationally' (in [Oakley and O'Brien 2016](#), 480); the narrowness of the class basis of the sector accompanies a similarly narrow set of attitudes and values ([McAndrew, O'Brien, and Taylor 2019](#)). Furthermore, potentially, it sets the conditions for the limited valuation given to social networking with organisations outside the arts.

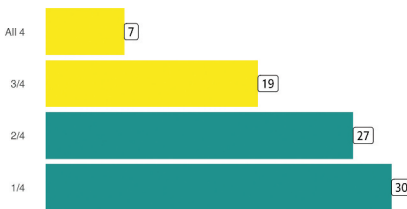
The first question was behavioural. It asked respondents to identify the audience development strategies the organisation used, allowing them to choose multiple answers from a list (see [Figure A2](#)). Some options recognised the complexity community and identity. Selecting the response, 'Customer to customer marketing' for example, indicates an awareness of the intersectional barriers that can discourage (or encourage) arts participation, the value of cultural intermediaries and the need for non-attenders to see 'people like them' attending in order to decide to join an audience. It also suggests an organisation's commitment to working relationally with people outside their organisation and sector. Selecting the response 'Analysis of non-attenders' suggests the organisation is actively working to understand demographic cohorts unfamiliar to the organisation, while selecting 'Outreach' indicates the organisation's commitment to working with actors external to their organisation. For this reason, these selections identified respondents' organisations as showing commitment to social networking. By selecting multiple responses and including some of these strategies to better understand or connect with target audiences, 26% of respondents were designated as from highly committed organisations (Leader) and 57% as from moderately committed organisations (Adaptor) in their responses (see [, top left](#)). The distinction between Leaders and Adaptors relied on the number of networking activities in which they took part, external to their organisation.

In contrast, responses that selected only traditional audience development strategies generated without working in networks with external actors designated the responses as demonstrating limited use of social networking. These included working with existing audiences only (e.g. exclusively selecting 'building connections between performers and audiences') and 'broadcast' marketing strategies such as 'public programs.' Seventeen per cent of responses were classified as showing such limited use ([Avoider](#), see [, top right](#)). In other words, a significant majority of organisations engaged in at least some social networking external to their organisation and sector to build new audiences.

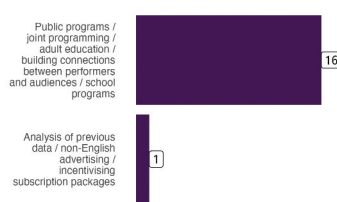
The volume of this response was offset by more Leader and Adaptor responses to two additional questions which, as signalled above, are more consistent with the behavioural question on social networking. A majority of respondents agreed that it was their organisation's responsibility to build and engage social networks ('One of our responsibilities is to facilitate opportunities for audiences to socialise,' 80%). They also recognised that 'Programming outside our usual venue will attract audiences' (85%), which relies on networks (such as local governments in relation to public spaces,

Audience development strategies included:

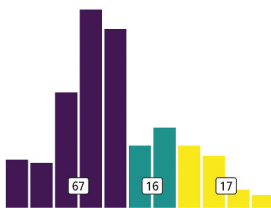
Customer-to-customer marketing, analysis of non-attenders, outreach, advertising in a new outlet

**Audience development strategies:**

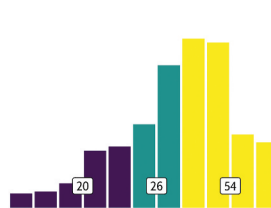
Did not include the four in the left-hand panel

**Attitude questions**

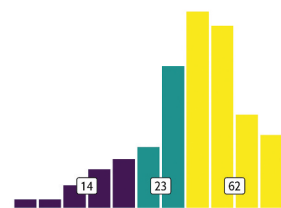
Audiences need tools such as program notes or education programs to better engage



One of our responsibilities is to facilitate opportunities for audiences to socialise



Programming outside our usual spaces will attract audiences



■ Avoider
■ Adaptor
■ Leader

Figure 2. Responses to questions about audience programming.

or trusts or corporations in relation to privately owned spaces). These attitudes show greater Leadership than the behavioural question by about 30%, so in responses that point in the same direction, attitudes stood out ahead of behaviour.

Importantly, in all questions, we investigated whether social networks external to the professional arts sector were valued and encouraged. Putting aside the reverse-coded question, there is a consistent 80–86% of Leader/Adaptor responses together, and correspondingly 14–20% of Avoider responses in relation to questions about social networking. Interestingly, this pattern is consistent across the questions about both behaviour and attitudes.

3.3. Business improvement processes

We asked three behavioural questions and four attitudinal questions about the value and use of audience evaluation within the organisation to understand the capacity of organisations to improve business processes (see Figure 3). These questions were more interdependent than the earlier examples discussed, in that they built on one another. The first behavioural question provided context and information for subsequent questions: it asked whether information was collected from the 'target audience', as opposed to the existing audience. This question investigated whether organisations were actively seeking to break the cycle of programming works that service existing audiences. We looked for responses that indicated engagement with community organisations or members from the target audience as evidence of a commitment to business improvement, but more importantly, this question provided critical prior knowledge for the next three questions, which – as described below – ask about the extent to which this knowledge is fed back into and influences the organisation. One-third of responses to this question about evaluation *behaviour* showed significant evaluation processes (Leader), with advice taken from organisations with links to

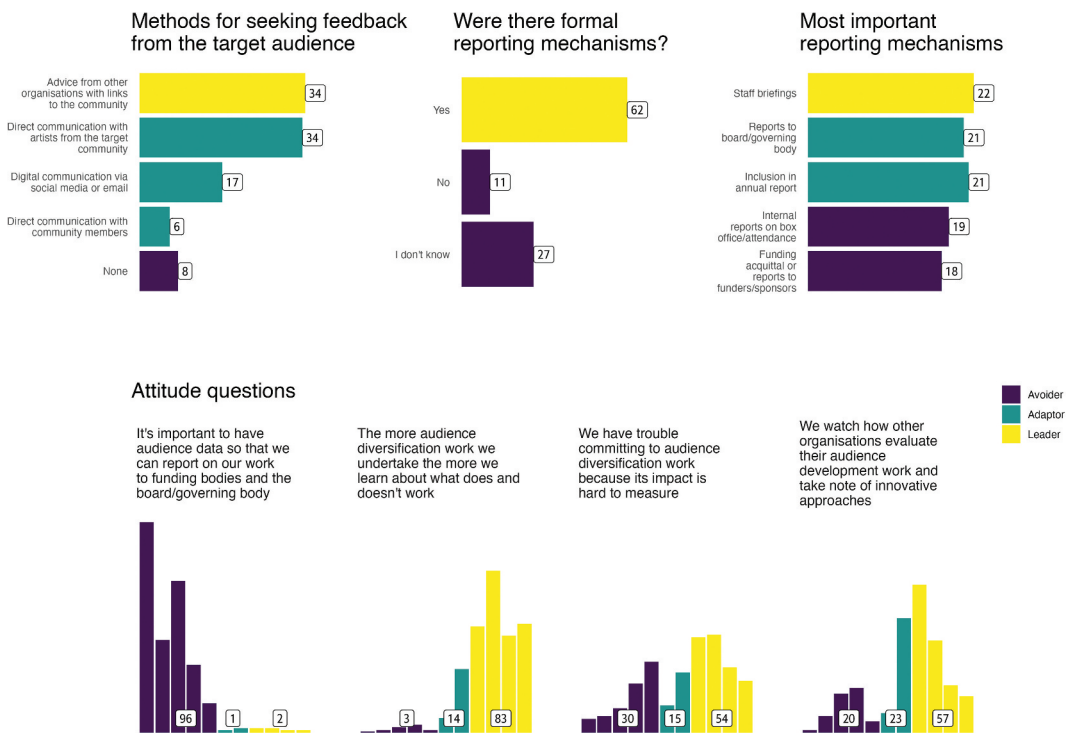


Figure 3. Responses to questions about reporting and audience feedback.

the community; the majority of other responses to this question showed moderate evaluation behaviour (Adaptor), with different modes of communication with the arts community or current audiences, rather than the broader community.

The second question asked whether the organisation had formal reporting mechanisms to analyse and apply audience evaluation data, which again led to the final behavioural question which asked what formal reporting mechanisms were used. Leader behaviour required respondents to answer that yes, their organisation did have formal reporting mechanisms and – demonstrating organisation-wide commitment – that this information was provided back into the organisation through staff briefings, rather than simply fulfilling external requirements such as funding acquittals. While a significant majority of respondents said that their organisation had formal reporting mechanisms for audience evaluation (62%), only 22% reported that evaluations were formally shared across the organisation through staff briefings. This was the most common response, marginally greater than the number of responses that included reporting to their boards (21%), in annual reports (21%), reports on box office/attendance for organisations (19%), or to funding bodies (18%). However, when the categories of response are aggregated into Leader, Adaptor, and Avoider behaviour, fewer respondents were categorised as Leaders (22%) and many more Adaptors (42%) and Avoiders (38%). This suggests that embedding evaluation throughout the organisation is still not common practice.

The set of questions that subsequently examined attitudes included a reverse-coded question that asked for a level of agreement to 'It's important to have audience data so that we can report on our work to funding bodies and the board/governing body.' We included this question because Leader behaviour is associated with valuing audience data for internal organisation reasons. Responses to this question were overwhelmingly in agreement, placing respondents in the Avoider category at 96%. This outcome, coupled with the fact that most organisations have formal

reporting mechanisms, indicates there is a great preoccupation with reporting on funding and the role that funders have played in mandating or encouraging the collection of audience data. It may well be that the 3% that did not agree with this statement simply have less reliance on funding sources that require such reporting.

Consistent with our findings in relation to the first two capabilities, this reverse-coded question can be contrasted with the remaining attitudinal questions, where the proportion of Leaders formed the majority. Eighty-three per cent of respondents agreed with the statement: 'The more audience diversification work we undertake the more we learn about what does and doesn't work.' Given that 80% of respondents had said that their organisation did not provide staff briefings on their evaluation efforts, it is interesting to consider what mechanisms there are for learning from audience diversification, who in the organisation has the opportunity to learn from this information, and what decisions they are able to influence with it.

The final two questions are interesting considered together. We asked respondents for their level of agreement with the statement: 'We have trouble committing to audience diversification work because its impact is difficult to measure,' looking for low agreement with this statement as indicative of significant commitment to business improvement processes (Leader). We then asked about the extent to which organisations watch each other's audience evaluation and development behaviour and note innovative approaches, looking for high levels of agreement. The number of responses that strongly agreed to both questions is largely consistent at 54 and 57% respectively. Again, this shows a confidence and appetite for collecting audience data and using novel ways to do so, as well as a lack of concern about how it is measured. Yet there is a larger proportion of low agreement in most of these questions than there was in the other two question sets discussed here. When the analysis of the behavioural response above about reporting is included, these results prompt a question about how extensively audience data is used across the organisation. This section also showed the greatest divergence in attitudes, with relatively small proportions of Adaptors in the attitude questions, and large proportions of responses at the extremes of the scale – Leaders and Avoiders – in the last two attitude questions. We consider this to reflect different knowledge in different roles across the organisations, with audience development and diversification being the preserve of the marketing departments, in the same way that programming is the preserve of the artistic team and director.

This enthusiasm for the idea, or tendency towards collecting data on audiences for reporting purposes, can be contrasted with the limited enthusiasm seen elsewhere; organisations are not using the information collected to change their way of operating, but rather using it for external reporting purposes and indeed for rationalising stasis. Their attitude towards organisational change is not reflected in their organisation's behaviour. To enact change where the attitudes of an organisation are reflected in its behaviour, existing habits need to be disrupted (Verplanken and Orbell 2022).

4. Discussion and conclusion

The survey of Australian publicly funded arts organisations has provided insights into where organisational processes are advancing or stymied in relation to the three organisational capabilities. All three capabilities require greater involvement or information sharing between the organisation and the non-arts sector communities important to it. Dynamic capabilities embrace the task of balancing programming against its assessment of its audiences. The purpose of social networking is for staff to better understand and relate to the communities that comprise their audiences. Business improvement processes include sharing assessments of business activity based on external evaluations (such as by audiences) to shape the internal decisions of the organisation.

We draw particular attention to three sets of findings. The first is that there is significant scope to experiment with changing the way programming decisions are made, particularly by growing the relationship between the programming team and its audiences. The large proportion of Avoiders in the reverse-coded question about who is mainly responsible for programming showed little

investment by the organisation in co-design or co-production of the program with non-arts sector stakeholders. This preservation of artistic programming from understanding and incorporating the realities of target audiences limits organisations' ability to behave responsively and dynamically.

The second insight is that while there is a strong appetite for evaluating audience feedback, there is little evidence about how that feedback is deployed. Most organisations took part in some external networking for audience development, albeit with limited contact directly with community members of target audiences. However, feedback is not commonly solicited from members of the communities regarded as potential new audiences, but is limited to the organisations' existing networks. Audience evaluation still appears to be collectively used to meet formal requirements placed on the organisation, rather than used by the organisation for its own self-development. This suggests that many organisations still frame audience evaluation in the context of what was perhaps the original motivation for doing it: mandatory governance and funding requirements.

Finally, the third set of findings is based on the differences between responses to questions that investigated attitudes and those focused on behaviours. In contrast to much of the literature examined above, which compared individual 'behavioural intent' and then actual individual behaviour, our research compares individual attitude towards programming, audience development, and the use of audience data, with organisational behaviour in relation to these. There is perhaps even less likelihood of alignment between these than there is between individual attitude and individual behaviour, because most organisational processes are considered outside the perceived behavioural control of individual workers. Indeed, across all question sets, attitudes exceed behaviour in the proportions that occupy the category of Leaders, while the category of Adaptors is more consistent across attitudes and behaviours.

These results all suggest more interest in actions that would diversify audiences (i.e. attitude) than are currently embedded into organisational processes (i.e. behaviour), although there is less confidence in such actions when they encroach on artistic programming. Together, Fishbein and Ajzen's (2010) and Wicker's (1969) reasons why behaviours may not match attitudes point to certain possible structural causes. In particular, 'the tendency to comply with norms' - particularly norms around the way that programming decisions are made - is pertinent. The tendency to comply with norms is also evident in relation to resistance to social networking beyond the arts sector, which indicates that arts workers are beholden to a professional, self-referential 'bubble'.

Another reason given for a discrepancy between attitudes and behaviour is 'competing motives', particularly risk avoidance. Financial diligence or conservatism often competes in the organisation's priorities with the risks taken to increase audience diversity, such as sharing programming decisions with communities. Furthermore, it may be difficult for staff to change behaviours to match their own attitudes because they perceive that others in their organisation, perhaps staff with greater status and seniority, are resistant to change, regardless of whether this is indeed the case.

The tendency to comply with norms raises the question of how to bring about change across the sector to address these norms. One catalyst might be a 'persuasive intervention' from an exogenous source that encourages new habit formation (Verplanken and Orbell's 2022). The role of public policy and funding is important here. While there are increasingly explicit policy strategies to address the goal of diversifying audiences (e.g. *Revive*), these have focused on workforce diversity and have largely been driven by requirements of government and funding bodies, rather than responsive support for organisational change. For instance, government bodies now often require the boards of public organisations to report on the diversity of their staff and members, in order to encourage material changes to their composition, until such diversity increasingly becomes a self-expectation not only of those organisations but also their peers (see, for example, State Government of Victoria, n.d.). Genuine change to diversify audiences requires a sector-wide effort that addresses the factors that prevent attitudes being reflected in behaviour.

Notes

1. Peak bodies are member-based advocacy organisations that service specific parts of a larger industry. Theatre Network Australia, Performing Arts Connections Australia, National Public Galleries Alliance and Australian Museums and Galleries Association supported the research by distributing the call for participants to their member organisations. We also had support from peak bodies Arts Access Australia, Regional Arts Australia, Live Performance Australia, National Association of Visual Artists and Diversity Arts Australia.
2. The research received ethics clearance from Deakin University Human Ethics Advisory Group (HEAG). The project approval number is BL-EC 12–19.

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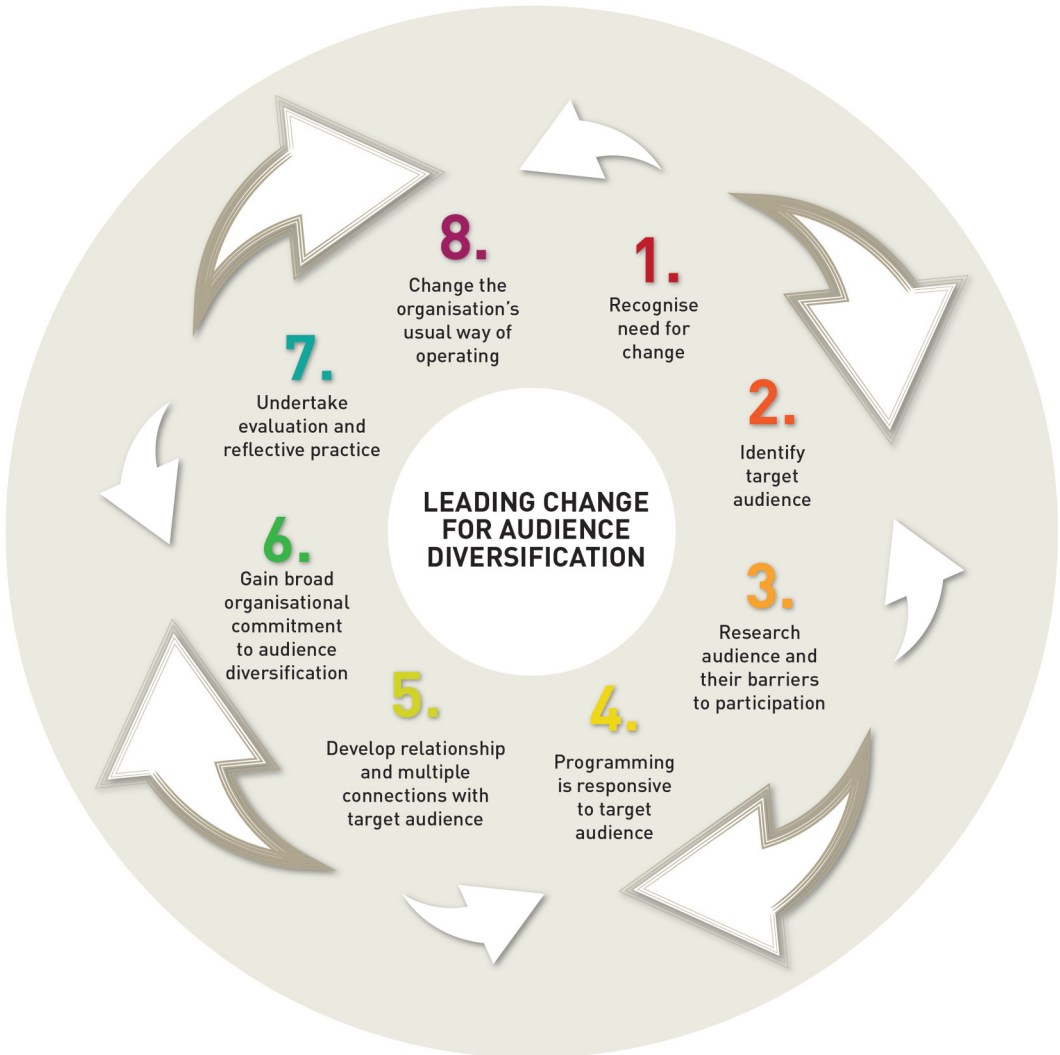
Appendix 1

Figure A1. Glow, Kershaw, and Reason's eight-task change model (2021).

Appendix 2

Did your core activity include any of the following audience development strategies?

By 'audience development' we mean collaboration between education, marketing and programming staff with the aim of deepening, broadening or diversifying audiences. Some audience development initiatives might aim for audience diversification while others are designed for a different purpose.

Please select all that apply.

- Education programs for schools
- Analysis of previous box office data or attendance numbers to identify patterns of attendance
- Incentivising subscription packages (for example with value add offers)
- Analysis of previous box office data or attendance to identify non-attenders
- Joint programming and/or promotions with other arts organisations
- Analysis of previous box office data or attendance numbers to identify loyalty
- Outreach (for example activities delivered at community venues)
- Education programs for adults
- Customer to customer marketing (for example use of social media or encouraging audience members to review/discuss the work)
- Advertising in a language other than English
- Public programs (for example artist talks or workshops)
- Building connections between performers/creators and audiences/viewers
- Advertising or promotion through a new outlet
- Other (please specify)
- None of these
- Don't know

Figure A2. Questions about audience development from Qualtrics survey.