CULTURAL DATA PROJECT

New Data Directions for the Cultural Landscape:

Toward a Better-Informed, Stronger Sector

New Data Directions for the Cultural Landscape: Toward a Better-Informed, Stronger Sector

Prepared for the **Cultural Data Project**

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Executive Summary

Over the last decade, the act of decision-making in organizations across all kinds of sectors—business, government, and nonprofit—has been transformed by data. Organizations use "big data" analytics to sift through reams of data about consumer and citizen behavior and reveal important insights about the way people shop, drive, vote, and click. New metrics have been developed to better predict everything from a Major League Baseball pitcher's win rate to which city blocks are likely to become crime hot spots. And product designers and social innovators treat survey, focus group, and ethnographic research as critical steps in building empathy—and then designing better solutions—for the communities they serve.

The cultural sector has, by no means, sat on the sidelines during this data revolution. In the last 50 years, the cultural data landscape has grown to encompass a big and diverse group of information-gatherers, data users, and metrics of interest. From the National Endowment for the Arts' Survey of Public Participation in the Arts to the growing number of cultural vitality databases and indices to the hundreds of studies commissioned by individual cultural organizations every year, we face an abundance of data about the cultural sphere. But it is not yet clear that the cultural sector is making effective and strategic use of all of this data. The field seems to be approaching an inflection point, where the long-term health, sustainability, and effectiveness of cultural organizations depend critically on investment in and collective action around enhancing the field's capacity for using data strategically and thoughtfully, to inform decision-making.

In this context, the Cultural Data Project set out to explore the current landscape of cultural data collection and use and to better understand what it would take for effective data-informed decision-making practices to flourish in the cultural sector—including the CDPs's own role in contributing to a stronger sector. The CDP partnered with Slover Linett Audience Research to engage leading thinkers from academia and the consulting world in a virtual dialogue about cultural data and the future of the field.

Informed by this dialogue, we identify six factors in this paper—three at the system-wide level and three operating at the level of individual cultural organizations—that influence the ways that cultural data are collected and used and which may be limiting the sector from effectively incorporating data into decision-making processes. At the system-wide level, we explore:

- Concerns about the accessibility, quality, and comparability of cultural data, which stem in part from the *ad hoc* way that the cultural data infrastructure has been developed, but which curtail the usefulness of existing cultural datasets.

- Norms in the cultural sector that have traditionally made data collection and use a relatively low priority, including the widespread (though perhaps waning) belief by many cultural practitioners that data are of limited—or even pernicious—value when it comes to making programmatic and/or artistic decisions.

- The ways in which the lack of coordination and standardization among existing data collection efforts inhibit progress in the field.

At the level of individual cultural organizations, we consider:

- The very real capacity constraints within cultural nonprofits, in terms of both resources and "know-how," that make it difficult to develop good data collection and interpretation capabilities.

- Dynamics in the internal culture of the organization, particularly with respect to its vision of its relationship to its community and audiences and its orientation to change, that can undermine the effective use of data.

- The lack of a strong organizational vision for how data can be used to inform internal planning and decision-making, as well as the lack of examples of such vision from around the field.

As the field engages in broad and multi-faceted conversation about the value of data to help the cultural sector stay relevant and viable in a changing world, we offer a few preliminary suggestions about the collection and use of cultural data:

- **Coordinate leadership on cultural data**. Coordinated (but distributed) leadership will be necessary to address questions of how data is perceived and valued by culture professionals, how those professionals are trained, and how we can develop shared language around data-informed decision making.

- **Include and engage program and artistic staff in the conversation about data**. As a field, we need to find new ways of collecting and interpreting data that truly support—rather than diminish—the creativity and excitement of programmatic decision-making, and we can only do that by building bridges between artists (and other programmatic leadership) and researchers.

- **Shift the conversation from data's value as an accountability tool to data's value as a decision-making tool.** Though funder-driven data requirements have helped to develop the cultural data landscape, they have also limited the scope of the conversation; it is time to broaden the conversation beyond accountability and reframe the power of data in terms of responsive decision-making.

- **Develop an agenda for future research and data collection, with clear objectives and a plan of action.** We encourage the field to build on the potential areas for new research and data collection identified here—including greater research into the value of cultural experiences and cultural organizations and a fresh inquiry into how preferences, tastes, and demand for cultural experiences change and grow over time—to develop a coordinated, strategic agenda for knowledge-building.

- **<u>Encourage training and professional development in data-related skills.</u>** There must be more attention paid to, and more investment in, the technical, analytical, and interpretive capacities of those who work in the sector—particularly nonprofit administrators but also consultants, service organization leaders, and funders.

- **<u>Improve the cultural data infrastructure.</u>** The standards and infrastructure for data collection is in need of a considerable upgrade and advances in technology also need to be pursued to improve data collection, production, and analysis processes.

The time is ripe for a broader dialogue about how to strengthen the cultural sector by improving its relationship to data. We believe that, through further conversation and coordinated leadership, the cultural sector can embrace data-informed decision-making and all of the opportunities it affords.

Introduction

Over the last decade, advances in the collection, analysis, and application of data have transformed the way decisions are made in a wide variety of fields. Organizations from Google and Netflix to Target and the 2008 Obama re-election campaign have collected and analyzed countless terabytes of data about consumer or constituent behavior to make better decisions about what movies to recommend to you, what products to market to you, or what email subject-line to use to entice you to contribute. The "sabermetrics" revolution in Major League Baseball provided general managers with a host of new metrics that are useful for predicting the impact that individual players would have on their club's performance, and gave coaches sophisticated, data-driven ways of deciding whom to start and whom to bench for any given game. Meanwhile, at consumer product companies and social nonprofits alike, the adoption of human-centered design processes (often called "design thinking") has made other forms of data collection—qualitative, ethnographic, and participatory—central to the development of products and programs that engage intended end-users and achieve desired outcomes.

These three trends—mining and analysis of "big data" to reveal patterns about human behavior and decision-making; the development of new metrics to more accurately understand and predict performance; and the integration of data collection directly into design, planning, and innovation processes—are just a few illustrations of the rise of data-informed decision making in business, government, and the nonprofit sector. Early evidence suggests that the practice of data-informed decision-making (or "data-driven decision-making," as it is sometimes called) has a real impact on performance. Recent research by MIT economists suggests that businesses that engage in these practices—not just collecting data but incorporating the resulting insights into decision-making—see a five to six percent boost in productivity.[1] But data-informed decision-making is not only the province of business leaders seeking to improve bottom-line performance. It is also being used to enhance student performance in the K-12 education system and to improve patient outcomes in the healthcare system, among other domains. Regardless of the type of organization, leaders who aren't harnessing the power of data as an input to decision-making may be missing out on opportunities to help their organizations effectively and efficiently deploy limited resources, navigate and manage change, and realize vital performance and mission-related goals.

Where does the nonprofit cultural sector stand in this new data landscape? How have arts & culture organizations embraced data-informed decision-making practices? And what is the current state of cultural data collection, analysis, interpretation, and use? These questions are of deep interest to the leadership of the Cultural Data Project (CDP), a program first launched in 2004, brought under the auspices of The Pew Charitable Trusts for incubation in 2005, and recently established as an independent 501(c)(3) entity. As the CDP imagines new possibilities for its future, its leadership team recognizes that its mission—to strengthen the cultural sector

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[1] Steve Lohr, "When There's No Such Thing as Too Much Information," *New York Times*, April 23, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/24/business/24unboxed.html?_r=0.

through the collection, analysis, and dissemination of cultural data—is inextricably linked to a much larger ecology of institutions and individuals involved in the collection and use of data in the cultural sphere (and beyond) and to the ways in which the entire field is evolving.

To better understand the landscape around it, and to inform its thinking about how it can and should fulfill its mission, the CDP has partnered with Slover Linett Audience Research to invite leading thinkers from academia and the consulting world into a virtual dialogue about cultural data. We asked **Alan Brown** (WolfBrown), **John Jacobsen** (White Oak Institute), **Roland Kushner** (Muhlenberg College), **Larry McGill** (The Foundation Center), **Ian David Moss** (Fractured Atlas), **Susan Nelson** (TDC), **Anne Gadwa Nicodemus** (Metris Arts Consulting), **Jennifer Novak-Leonard** (Cultural Policy Center at the University of Chicago), **Zannie Voss** (National Center for Arts Research), **Joanna Woronkowicz** (Indiana University), and **Margaret Wyszomirski** (The Ohio State University)[2] to think with us about the current state of the cultural data landscape: how data is and *could be* used to help cultural organizations become more financially stable, more programmatically and/or artistically meaningful, and better equipped to both generate and demonstrate public value.

Informed by the insights of this esteemed and knowledgeable group of thought-leaders, as well as by responses to CDP's internal strategic planning survey and by additional work by Margaret Wyszomirski to frame and inventory the cultural data landscape, we offer in this paper some thoughts about the current state of data collection and use in the cultural sphere as well as some suggested steps toward a healthier, more strategic, and more coordinated cultural data landscape. This paper is not intended to serve as a formal assessment of the current state of data collection; in fact, we believe that an important next step in this dialogue may be to build a more systematic baseline understanding of the real data collection and usage capabilities and patterns across the sector. This document is intended merely as a starting-point for a broader, field-wide conversation about cultural data, a conversation which should include policymakers, funders, service organizations, and the leaders of cultural nonprofits in addition to the research community already represented here. We hope that such a broader conversation will catalyze further conversation and productive, concerted action around data collection and data-informed decision-making in the cultural sector.

<u>Methodology</u>

We designed and developed a private online forum, which was moderated by Slover Linett over approximately three weeks in late August/early September, 2013. The forum was administered in three rounds, each initiated by prompting text crafted by Slover Linett and CDP, to which each invited contributor posted a response. For the second and third rounds, the prompts were written in response to the themes emerging in the group's previous input, so that the dialogue built iteratively and organically. The prompts included questions such as:

[2] See Appendix A for bios for all contributors.

- How open and/or ready (in terms of knowledge, skills, or capacity) do you believe cultural nonprofits are to using data to improve their organizational performance (whether financial or management performance, artistic/programmatic performance, individual and/or community impact, etc.)?

- What do you see as the area or areas in which cultural nonprofits are most effectively using data to improve their performance?

- What do you see as the most important area or areas in which cultural nonprofits could or should be using data to improve organizational performance—but currently aren't?

- What are some examples of cultural data that are currently being collected (whether by individual organizations, service organizations, policy-makers, academics, or some other source), but which are not being used to their full potential, in your opinion? What would need to happen for such data to be used more effectively or seen as more valuable?

- What are the opportunities for connecting different existing data sets or sources of cultural data? What are the potential benefits to the field, and who are the potential beneficiaries, of such connections? What are the barriers to those connections being made?

- What kinds of data are we, as a field, not collecting and analyzing that we should be (or not collecting and analyzing in a systematic, centralized way)? What stands in the way of collecting and analyzing that data?

- What do you think could or should be done to foster a stronger culture of data-informed decision-making throughout the cultural sector?

- What would you nominate as two or three questions that "the field" should be asking, and about which data (whether collecting new data or aggregating or analyzing existing data) would help provide the answers?

- What are two or three specific changes or reforms that you would make—at any level throughout the system—to catalyze or contribute to systemic change? What could or should CDP's role be in contributing to positive systemic change?

In the analysis that follows, we quote directly but anonymously from contributors' posted responses. In some cases, quotes have been edited for concision and clarity. We also draw on open-ended responses to CDP's internal strategic planning survey[3] and a companion piece prepared by Margaret Wyszomirski, "An Overview of the Cultural Data Landscape" (see

[3] Note that responses to the CDP strategic planning survey have not been systematically analyzed for the purposes of this paper; please contact the CDP for more information about those results.

Appendix). Note that our exploration in these pages, while directly informed by the participants' comments, is not strictly a summary of their input; it also represents the author's own appraisal and conclusions, and we take responsibility for the content, including any errors or oversights.

A note about definitions

No discussion of the cultural data landscape in the U.S. can begin without acknowledging that both "cultural sector" and "cultural data" currently lack clear, universally-accepted definitions. As one contributor noted, "The community is diverse and fragmented with respect to age, size, and principal area of focus." Another asked, "Does 'the field' specifically mean professional arts-producing or presenting organizations? Is 'the field' defined more broadly as cultural organizations? If so, how far-reaching is that definition?" Others flagged the fact that "data" can mean anything from an informal tally of the number of people at last night's performance to sophisticated micro-data about organizational performance, to aggregate trends reported in outlets such as Giving USA's annual study of contributions in the nonprofit sector.

We believe it is important to start this dialogue from as comprehensive a perspective as possible while still maintaining a coherent focus. Heeding the words of one contributor who encouraged "broader thinking about the 'field' when it comes to building arts data-systems or calling for a change in the arts-related data environment," we define the cultural sector inclusively as: individual cultural nonprofit and community-based organizations; the funding, policy, academic, and service communities that support and are allied with them; and the individual artists and cultural participants, audiences, and communities they serve and are served by. With that broad definition in mind, we realized that it would be important not to limit this dialogue to the level of the "micro-data" collected by individual cultural organizations. Instead, we tried to broaden the scope of inquiry beyond organizations' internal operating and programmatic data to include issues of: data collection and analysis of household-level participation behaviors, attitudes, and preferences (which may even include participation at organizations outside the nonprofit space); measurement of both the intrinsic and instrumental value of cultural providers and cultural participation; and measurement of the impact of cultural programming on communities and individual participants. While we believe that many of the issues raised in this paper are also relevant to non-arts cultural organizations—zoos and aquariums; science, history, and children's museums; parks and gardens—we acknowledge that much of this discussion was more heavily weighted toward the arts.

The cultural data landscape today

"Data" is probably not the first word that most Americans associate with arts & culture institutions. But in fact, there is a rich array of data about the cultural sphere, and that information base is growing bigger by the day. In the words of one contributor in our online dialogue about the cultural data landscape, "We have come a long way in developing data sources on arts and cultural activities in the United States in the past fifty years. The quantity of data being gathered has moved from scarcity to abundance." In the 1950s and '60s, data about cultural organizations and cultural participation came primarily from the federal government, in the form of economic performance data about both for-profit and nonprofit entities and consumer data tracking the spending patterns of Americans. It also came from grant-making organizations, which collected basic data to keep tabs on their own grant-making activities. Today, the cultural data landscape encompasses a much bigger and broader set of information-gatherers, data users, and metrics of interest, from the National Endowment for the Arts' Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA) to ground-breaking initiatives to quantify art's intrinsic impact on individual audience members; from individual organizations' internal studies to understand their constituents to a handful of cultural vitality databases, indices, and reports such as Americans for the Arts' Arts and Economic Prosperity report, that track and compare creative and cultural activity in American cities, regions, or the nation as a whole. (For more on the different types of cultural data currently being collected and, particularly, the history of cultural data collection referenced above, see Appendix B, "A Taxonomy of Cultural Databases," excerpted from Margaret Wyszomirski's companion to piece to this paper, entitled "An Overview of the Cultural Data Landscape." The full paper, which deeply informed our analysis here, is available from the CDP on request.)

Cultural data are not just more abundant than ever before; the idea of data itself is also coming into a sort of vogue in the cultural field. In the words of one respondent to the CDP's internal strategic planning survey, "Data is the new black." This groundswell of interest in data was noted by many participants in our forum, as well: "Norms and expectations about the need for and use of data in professional contexts are also rapidly changing." Many organizations, particularly but not exclusively large cultural organizations, are investing heavily in the development of systems for collecting and storing data: "Over the last decade, millions of dollars and millions of staff/volunteer hours have been invested in creating systems that track finances, customer relationships, donor behaviors, and product popularity, to touch on a few major categories. Technological improvements have enabled even quite small organizations to have access to powerful tools that make data collection, storage, and analysis relatively inexpensive as compared to years past." And increasingly, demand for rigorous, meaningful cultural data is coming from outside the sector too—spurred in large part by the tremendous progress that has been made in developing indicators to understand and measure cultural activity at a community- or city-wide level: "I am hearing from broad community coalitions and from regional economic development organizations… [who] are reaching out because they want to have meaningful recognition of arts and culture in their overall assessments of the

area.…They see arts and culture as a merit good that should be considered in addition to ecological health, public health, transportation infrastructure, education, public safety, and other amenities."

To be sure, there are gaps in the data currently being collected about the cultural sector, and we discuss below some of the most critical needs for new data collection efforts, some of which may require using new data collection methods (see page 18). But despite the increasing volume of data and the considerable attention now focused on words like "measurement," "evaluation," and "assessment" in conferences, workshops, webinars, and grant guidelines, it is not yet clear that the cultural sector is making effective and strategic use of the data already at its disposal—including CDP data, as well as the many other forms and sources of data in the sector. Many of the experts in our forum emphasized that the greatest potential for progress in the cultural data landscape may be found not merely in collecting more data, but in enhancing the field's capacity to use data more strategically, more thoughtfully, and more effectively to improve the health of the cultural sector as a system and the individual organizations within it. Said one contributor, "what [arts managers] really need are better filters, not more information."

Field-level challenges

At the **system-wide level**, contributors identified three interrelated factors that influence the ways that cultural data are collected and used, and which contribute to the sense that the sector may be missing out on opportunities to more effectively incorporate data into decision-making processes. They are:

- concerns about the accessibility, quality, and comparability of cultural data, stemming in part from the *ad hoc*, piecemeal way that the cultural data infrastructure has been developed;

- norms in the cultural sector about data collection and use, including a widespread (though now perhaps waning) belief by many cultural practitioners that data—and especially quantitative data—are of limited value or even pernicious when it comes to making programmatic and artistic decisions;

- a lack of coordination and standardization in existing cultural data collection efforts.

We look at each of these factors in turn.

The accessibility, quality, and comparability of cultural data

Despite the growth in cultural data collection in recent years, a considerable amount of that data remains inaccessible to those who might be able to use it to inform their own decision-making or to expand knowledge about the cultural sector. Many of the main repositories of cultural data, such as federal datasets, are technologically challenging to access. And analyzing

and interpreting that data is an even bigger hurdle, especially for individual cultural organizations that may not have staff members with the requisite skills. "Trained researchers find accessing these data challenging; until such data become easier to access and understand, cultural nonprofits will continue to rely on informal networks to gather relevant anecdotal information on as catch-as-catch-can basis." The CDP is not an exception to these barriers. Many of the organizations that provide information to the CDP are not taking advantage of the reporting tools, contributing to the sense that CDP is something that they contribute *to* rather than something they derive value *from*. "Because of the barriers present in accessing data (e.g., lack of time and data-use training, clunky and difficult to use databases), many nonprofits simply do not attempt to make better use of data at their disposal that could help improve organizational performance. I think finding ways to eliminate these barriers would undoubtedly make more cultural nonprofits ready to use data."

There is also a large volume of cultural data that is collected in a proprietary way, available only to the organization that commissioned the study or analysis, even though it may contain insights that would be beneficial for a much wider group of organizations and stakeholders. Said one contributor, "The databases that are available need to become more transparent and available. Too much data in this field is for members only or is proprietary." Another asked whether "professional associations, consultants, and others who are key voices in the research we are talking about organizations consuming make their data available in some public-use format for credentialed researchers?"

Moreover, cultural data often fail to meet the standards of quality that data in other fields are expected to meet. To some degree, this is inextricably connected to the (healthy) decentralization of the sector, as well as to the lack of training and tools for effective data collection in the cultural field and lack of coordination among data collection efforts (discussed below). Aside from cultural data collection undertaken by university-based research centers and academics (which does represent a non-trivial and important source of knowledge about the sector), there is no real arbiter of or standard-bearer for what constitutes high-quality cultural data collection and analysis. Even when it comes to something as seemingly straightforward and fundamental as measuring cultural organizations' audience demographics, different organizations apply vastly different standards of scrutiny to the data they collect, some relying on self-selected "convenience" samples of audience members and others partnering with academic researchers or consultants to design random, representative sampling efforts that yield more accurate audience measures. There isn't a centralized resource to help cultural practitioners understand and implement "best practices" around such measurement.

One problem may be that much cultural data collection, again particularly at the organizational level, is instigated at the behest of funders rather than as an operating priority of the organizations and practitioners involved. Knowing that the data and metrics they share with funders may be used in future funding decisions, organizations have an incentive to prioritize other data attributes ahead of strict objectivity and thoroughness—especially in the absence of

consistent, centralized definitions of what to collect and how to collect it. "The self-reported nature of the information and organizations' concerns about how it will be used can affect their willingness to report 'accurately,' particularly when it comes to ill-defined measures like attendance," said one participant in our forum.

In turn, the problem of lax norms around data accuracy at the individual organization level necessarily compromises the quality of aggregate data sets, including the CDP. One contributor called for "increased vigilance on data accuracy. … Although CDP doesn't canvas the entire US arts and cultural sector, it does collect deep data from thousands of arts organizations annually. It does an amazing job under the circumstances but there's always room for improvement on reporting and verification. Each time erroneous information is reported and response errors are missed, it means that what are reported as outcomes for the field are inaccurate." That forum participant called for "a system-wide change" to "take accuracy of reporting seriously" in part by "validating survey responses to minimize errors." Even when individual organizations recognize that data accuracy and completeness are important when contributing to broader datasets like the CDP, they also feel they can't do it alone; they need support in order to be able to report fully and accurately. Said one respondent to CDP's internal strategic planning survey, "We don't fill out some of the information, but you should make us do that and teach us how to find that information if we don't know how to."

Finally, existing cultural datasets would be even more powerful if they could be connected to each other. Doing so would be a challenge, however, and some of the steps that would be necessary to make ongoing data collection comparable across different organizations or different segments of the sector might also diminish the usefulness of that data. (For instance, defining "attendance" in a way that makes sense for both a large natural history museum and a small community arts organization could make the data collected less meaningful for both types of organization.) Even advanced researchers consider combining and integrating disparate datasets a challenging and long-term project. But it would be an important step on the road to generating broad knowledge that could help the field. "Data would be more valuable to both researchers and the field if there were a one-stop, go-to source," said one participant. "Integration of numerous data sets is painfully tedious but necessary. If there were one source that had already gone through the integration process with deep knowledge of fine-grained differences in survey line items, *and* all the data were geocoded, it would remove a big access hurdle to researchers and arts leaders."

<u>Norms about data collection and use in the cultural sector</u>

Partly because of the way the cultural landscape developed, growing out of economic and consumer spending analysis by the federal government, the *supply* of cultural data has often preceded the *demand* for data from within the sector. (Again, see Margaret Wyszomirski's companion piece for more on the history of cultural data collection.) As a number of our participants noted, cultural data collection often skips over the process of articulating research questions—a step which usually comes first and helps guide data collection and analysis in

other civic, policy, and commercial realms: "Too often the approach, at both the organizational and field levels, is to collect information first, and define questions later. This can result in large-scale efforts that absorb dollars and time but ultimately are not able to effectively address core questions." And because the data often comes first, the field is less adept at identifying and framing good questions around which data could help move the field forward.

Here too, the funding community has in some ways reinforced this 'data first, questions second' mindset. Funder requests often determine what kind of data organizations choose to collect and may crowd out organizations' interest in asking questions that could inform their own decision-making. This may contribute to a sort of vicious cycle in which organizations' primary experiences with data are framed as a duty to a funder, and since the data requested by the funder may not be what the organization itself needs to know for its own reflection and improvement, data collection comes to be perceived as a 'cost of doing business' rather than an investment that brings strategic value to the organization. "Figuring out how [data] informs the organization's work going forward is really hard conceptual and pragmatic work," noted one forum participant. "Without clear uses and benefits…I suspect it gets knocked down a few spots on the list of organizational priorities…even among those with a true interest. For this to work, organizations need to cultivate an internal culture that prioritizes critical reflection that stems from their own desire, not a grant-maker's desire."

There are also ways in which data-informed decision-making continues to be seen in some corners of the cultural sector as contrary to artistic and creative practice. According to this view, the making and experiencing of art defy measurement, so cultural data are inherently of limited value to arts organizations and the decisions they face. As one forum contributor put it, there is "a long-standing suspicion within the arts community that measurement amounts to commodification and that can prompt resistance to gathering and using data." As we discuss below, within individual organizations data are more commonly used in areas that are seen as auxiliary to the artistic offering—marketing and development, in particular—than they are to inform programmatic decision-making. But this bifurcated view of data may not be to the organization's benefit, since it excludes the core programmatic 'product' from data-informed decision-making and prevents organizations from acquiring knowledge about consumer preference, aesthetic and cultural value, loyalty, and other important contributors to success. As the previous participant noted, "arts administrators have acquired a taste for data used in financial management, fundraising, audience development and advocacy decision-making. But there is little data on artistic choice, much less data that allows us to explore the relationships between artistic programming and audience or organizational sustainability."

If this ambivalence about data is to be shifted, the onus is not just on artistic staff to welcome data into their processes; the cultural data and research community must also acknowledge the deep complexity associated with measurement around cultural programming and perhaps invest in developing new methods and measurement tools that are equal to the task of measuring the seemingly unmeasurable. "A growing focus on data invites concerns that those things which cannot be measured easily will be deemphasized or overlooked," cautioned one

contributor. "In the case of cultural nonprofits, these 'unmeasurables' may include those factors that are most central to organizations' mission and purpose, such as artistic expression and audience impact." For that reason, the data community might also be wise to invite artists to the table to develop those methods and metrics, which would make the resulting data more likely to be used in programming decisions. "We should be measuring what matters most, not just what is easiest to measure. What means most is the art. Measuring the secret sauce is daunting, both for those tackling measurement of it and those accepting the results."

Lack of coordination and standardization

The lack of centralization in the cultural data landscape not only affects the quality of the data that is collected, as discussed above, but also makes it difficult to develop a concerted agenda for cultural data collection and standardization. This, in turn, limits our capability to integrate across different cultural datasets to generate higher-order insights. The fragmented nature of the sector—particularly the fact that there are so many different kinds of cultural data stakeholders, with different motivations and foci—can make coordination challenging. Full coordination may not even be desirable, as it might gloss over important differences between different types of organization; but building new bridges might help us better understand the nature of those differences. As one participant put it: "I'd like to see more connecting-of-the-dots between research stemming from academic institutions and research stemming from agencies and consultants. I've lived in both worlds…[and] I'm well-aware of reasons behind the information-exchange chasm that currently exists, but I also think it can and needs to be bridged to advance the cultural field."

The sometimes siloed relationship between academic and applied cultural research also makes it difficult to develop shared language and standards around cultural data, which only exacerbates the data accuracy and quality challenges at issue in aggregated databases. This is an area where leadership, perhaps from an organization like the CDP, could be helpful. "There are many definitions out there; the issue is political—getting everyone to agree," noted one contributor. "The CDP could play a major role in developing a standardized language and menus of meaningful indicators." Both the cultural field and the broader social context in which it operates are changing. The experts in our forum agree that if we don't develop a shared agenda around data collection and cultural knowledge-building, it will be to our collective disadvantage. "The sand is shifting right under our feet, but there is no system for identifying research questions and addressing them at a collective level."

Organization-level challenges

At the **level of individual organizations**, contributors pointed to three additional considerations that inhibit the development of strategic data practices. All three are interwoven with the system-wide factors discussed above. They are:

- limited capacity within cultural nonprofits to develop good data collection and interpretation capabilities, in terms of both the time and resources available for such work and the data "know-how" necessary;

- organizational culture dynamics that sometimes work at cross-purposes to the effective use of data;

- the lack of a strong vision, and of examples of such vision from around the field, for how data can be an integral part of internal planning and decision-making.

<u>Limited organizational capacity</u>

In recent decades, Americans' rates of self-reported attendance at arts & culture organizations have been on a slow but steady decline (at least, at those types of organizations tracked in the NEA's Survey of Public Participation in the Arts) and, though the dollar amount of giving to the cultural sector actually grew this past year (according to the latest *Giving USA* report), many in the field perceive that competition for philanthropic resources is greater than ever before. The Great Recession of 2007–2009 exacerbated this situation and left many cultural organizations fighting to simply maintain their financial viability. In this context of scarcity and limited resources, many organizations lack the bandwidth to invest time or money into the development of better data practices, or even to meet funders' data-reporting requirements. Said one contributor, "Many cultural organizations are really in survival mode and focusing time on data inquiries comes at a cost." Many cultural leaders realize that investing in strategic data collection efforts—especially those that start with questions generated in the course of their own decision-making processes—has the potential to help their organizations step off of the financial-survival treadmill. But the demands of day-to-day survival also make it exceedingly difficult for them to engage in the sort of long-term thinking that might make an investment in data seem worthwhile. "The cost-benefit analysis takes a lot of faith in future benefits against the certain present cost of acquiring and analyzing data," noted one forum participant. "Combined with the lack of native capacity and the mysterious quality of some data projects, the enhanced quality of decision-making that is better informed by data is a tough sell."

Some organizations have invested in data collection and analysis systems, of course. But the capacity of their staffs to make sense of the outputs of those systems and think strategically about what they're learning from the data remains underfunded. The 'hard' skills associated with data—sampling and survey design, statistical analysis, use of statistical software—are rarely considered to be requirements for positions within the cultural sphere, and few enter the profession with more than the most rudimentary research training. Moreover, data collection and analysis responsibilities are often relegated to low-salary, junior-level staffers who are given little in the way of training and professional development. These small-scale investments are virtually guaranteed to fall short of providing robust information and insight that can be used to improve performance, and they often fail to cultivate a culture of data-informed

decision making within the organization. One forum participant saw this as a cycle: "Positions are underfunded, causing high turnover, which leads to poor data control and the inability to extract data in any consistent manner. Organizations' efforts to use external data – such as demographic trends, consumer behavior, and benchmarks – to guide strategy tend to run into similar obstacles. The staff often does not have the sophistication and/or capacity to identify high-quality data or its implications." So the leadership and senior staff come to think of data gathering and analysis as a distraction, leading to further reluctance to invest in better methods or capacity-building.

It's not only the technical skills associated with data collection and analysis that are underdeveloped in the sector; engaging in data-informed decision-making also requires "soft" skills like problem and/or question identification, critical reflection, synthesis, interpretation, and comfort with ambiguity even in a quantitative context. Like the 'hard' research skills just mentioned, these capacities aren't usually a focus of training or professional development in cultural careers. But they are exactly what's needed to turn the current wave on interest in data in the cultural sector into effective practices and action—and are even more important to develop "in-house" than the hard skills, which can be more effectively outsourced to consultants. "We need to build skills to absorb and reflect on multiple sources of information, to prioritize what is important and what is a credible source, and then to synthesize and deliberate," argued one contributor. "I don't know how you address that skill set except through formal academic training, but it is a great need, and the need will only get greater." Identifying useful research questions and keeping the data 'cart' behind the management 'horse' will be crucial. "Currently," said one participant, "data collection is not driven by a set of targeted questions, but instead by the idea that more is better. This occurs because there is a profound lack of skilled staff and consultants in the sector who actually understand that data is a tool and not an end."

As if time, resource, and "know how" limitations weren't enough, there's also an awareness barrier. Many cultural practitioners simply don't know about the cultural data that is already available and how it could be put to strategic use in their organizations. The blame for this lies mostly at the system level; see the issues of data accessibility and coordination explored above. But there's also a need for better training of individual arts administrators about cultural data resources. "Right now, most users 'pick up' knowledge of cultural datasets but tend to 'know' only a few, and the next generation has little guidance on what the basics and scope of existing cultural data is."

An important caveat to add here, however, is that cultural organizations are not all alike in their data-related capacities. Due to a variety of factors, some organizations are more data savvy and better consumers of data than others. For instance, size and institutional age may influence how robust an organization's data collection and analysis infrastructure is. Larger organizations, observed one participant, may have staff with "experience and/or training in how to access and manipulate cultural data," and also "often have the resources to outsource market research to consultants who have demonstrated expertise in such data use." Small

organizations, by contrast, "tend to make do with what they are personally able to do or what their volunteers/board members can do." And factors like board composition can influence how an organization uses data: it helps to have a high-engagement boards and trustees "who are familiar with the worlds of policy, business, enterprise, government, or other environments where data analysis is part of planning and decision-making," as another contributor put it.

Organizational culture dynamics

The extent to which cultural nonprofits use data to inform decision-making also depends in complex ways on the internal culture of the organization, particularly its vision of its relationship to its community and audiences. The experts in our forum noted that organizations that have made learning and adaptation central to their organizational culture are often more committed to, and better at using, cultural data than those that haven't prioritized that kind of self-improvement. That relationship is intuitive enough: An organization's perspective on change, adaptation, and responsiveness would naturally inform its embrace of (or resistance to) data-informed decision-making. Cultural leaders who recognize that their operating context is changing also recognize that they need to understand the nature of that change in order to stay ahead. As one participant put it, "Is this an organization committed to continual self-learning and improving service delivery? Or are they content to be complacent with the status quo?" The former are more likely to be "more explicitly conscious of external change as a driver of policy" and therefore more interested in collecting data to improve organizational performance.

Many cultural nonprofits, however, seem less focused on anticipating change and creatively strategizing ways to manage it. The leaders or boards of those organizations tend to concentrate on short-term survival rather than long-term planning, often out of sheer necessity. This approach can be at cross purposes with the mindset of inquiry and analysis associated with data-driven decision-making. In the words of one contributor, "Arts organizations have many masters and many pressures on decisions. Decisions tend to be made idiosyncratically by overworked staff or by under-informed board members 'in-the-moment.'" In addition, there is sometimes resistance to change on the part of individual staff or board members—including, as discussed above, reluctance by artistic and programming staff to use data to drive change in their domains.

Vision for using data in internal planning and decision-making

Despite the increased attention paid to data in the cultural field, the scope of data use in most cultural organizations remains relatively limited. Many cultural nonprofits readily recognize and embrace that data can strengthen the argument for funding, but fewer see it as a critical input to planning: "Data is welcome for demonstrating value and case-making, but interest and capacity to use it as an objective measure to ask hard questions about organizational performance and the state of the field isn't widespread," noted one of our contributors.

One exception to this is benchmarking: many organizations are hungry for data that helps them benchmark their internal operations and performance statistics against those of their peers. But our contributors expressed some skepticism about whether benchmarking data is being used strategically, or whether it's simply a disguised form of using data to make an organization's case. One participant expressed concern that the rise of benchmarking is leading organizations to adopt a "management by imitation" mindset. That benchmarking data is sometimes used in this overly prescriptive way suggests another opportunity for building understanding in the sector, in this case about which specific benchmarks are most valuable and how to use them appropriately and strategically. As several of our contributors pointed out, as a field we actually know relatively little about which indicators to use to track organizational performance and how to use them to help organizations operate more efficiently and effectively—a critical knowledge gap that must be filled.

Less common, however, is the collection and analysis of data to directly inform internal planning processes. Said one participant, "cultural nonprofits could make much better use of demographic and economic data …to inform long-range forecasting and strategic planning. These data are available; it's just a matter of figuring out how to use them." Marketing and development departments are the major exception here, and many administrators in these departments are active consumers of data—much more so than their programming counterparts. "People *really* want information on their audiences," one contributor noted. "[And] pretty much every organization is interested in learning anything that would help get more grant funding. By contrast, I have not seen widespread interest in or adoption of data to inform artistic/programmatic performance." Data practices in marketing and development have been supported by the development of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tools for the cultural sector, such as Tessitura and Raiser's Edge. Even here, though, the amount of information available through such systems may outpace organizations' capacity to draw insight from, and act on, that information.

In contrast, programming and artistic departments generally remain hesitant to use data in planning and decision-making in the first place—even as they wrestle with changing audience behaviors and expectations that research and data could help them understand. As noted in the introduction, in fields like business, architecture, and technology, such research often takes the form of 'user-centered design', in which observation of consumers is used in conjunction with iterative prototyping; the audience becomes part of the development of the product, service, or experience. In the cultural sphere, such approaches are vanishingly rare.[4] One participant noted, for example, that, "research seems to suggest that music is a visual experience for younger generations of concertgoers. But, with a few minor exceptions, I don't see the orchestra field – or anyone else in the nonprofit sector – doing the basic R&D to bring forth new artistic approaches to music visualization." Some contributors hope, however, that as marketing and

[4] However, the last few years have seen some individual artists working on similar principles with communities and audiences in what has been called 'social practice art' or 'relational aesthetics.' Arts administrators rarely give themselves the same license to collaborate with their audiences.

development departments become more effective by using data and research, their capabilities and norms will spread to other departments. One encouraged "work[ing] with these low-hanging fruits with immediate benefits and applications to build the practice of data use." But these experts emphasized that until data-informed decision-making takes hold in programming departments, we won't truly be able to say that the cultural sector is effectively using the available cultural data or using it to full effect. "Until we can engage artists and curators in examining audience, market and trend data, we can never really make progress as a field," said one. "I can count on one hand the number of times that I've been allowed to present research to actors, dancers and musicians. They are the ones who can move the world."

To bolster cultural organizations' use of data in all areas of planning, it will be important for the field as a whole to do a better job at conducting and disseminating research that reveals 'what works,' both programmatically and with respect to organizational practices. "The biggest gap in the arts knowledge economy is in the area of practice," noted one contributor. "What new or different artistic programs are leading to successful artistic outcomes? What new or different business practices are leading to successful operational outcomes? We have such a decentralized system, and the national service organizations are not resourced sufficiently to do a good job of identifying, tracking, and diffusing promising new practices in governance, fundraising, capitalization, programming, etc." Another added that most organizations are eager for this kind of information about their peers, which would take the concept of benchmarking into new and valuable areas: "I think cultural organizations would welcome as much information as possible about the types of programming that are being offered by other similar organizations, along with summary-level data about audience participation or attendance…. Is it new and different? Was it successful? Data that address these questions would be lapped up."

The gaps to fill

Though most participants in our forum stressed the importance of shoring up the field's capacity to interpret and use the cultural data that is already being collected, they also identified some opportunities to build foundational knowledge about the cultural sector through new data collection efforts around newly articulated questions. A few called for a much greater investment in basic cultural data collection:

> [W]e still have a long way to go before the arts and cultural sector has data that are sufficiently complete and robust to meet user needs. We have lots of partial, idiosyncratic, time- or geography-bound data on specific aspects of arts and cultural activities in the US. … We don't have a national arts data archive in the same way that we have archives of education statistics, health statistics, labor statistics, etc. It's not that there aren't also many interesting 'research questions' that could and should be asked, but many of our basic information needs about the scope, activities, employees and audiences of arts and cultural organizations are still full of gaping holes.

Participants also called for further inquiry into some fundamental questions about the sector, including:

- **the relationship between vibrant cultural participation rates and the health of individual cultural organizations** ("This would require studying arts consumption behaviors and attitudes in tandem with studying the health of the organizations that those consumers and patrons support. Neither exists in a vacuum. What we're currently missing, by and large, is accessible data on arts consumption/patronage");

- **the impact of funding investments, as well as new sources of earned revenue, on organizational culture and programmatic success** ("The sector requires an honest longitudinal analysis of the impact of different types of institutional investments in organizations of all types. Funders often do not understand the impact of their investments, where they can make the most difference, where they are substituting for market choice, and where they are actually causing dysfunction");

- **the impact of cultural policy on the cultural sector** ("We don't have consistent information about the effects of public policy on resources available to the arts or on public attitudes toward the arts and their different sources of revenue acquisition.")

In addition to these foundational and fundamental questions, contributors called for enhanced data collection and greater focus in two key areas: **the value of cultural experiences and cultural organizations** and **how people's preferences, tastes, and demand for cultural experiences change and grow over time**. Apropos of the value of cultural experiences, one contributor noted, "Whether we are looking for ways to capture public benefits that the arts provide—such as community identity and city image, social cohesion and tolerance, quality of life or community cultural vitality—or we are trying to gather good information about the instrumental value of the arts…there is still much to be done to improve this knowledge and to organize it into useable data and databases." Others suggested specific questions on the value question they would like the field to address, including:

- How do cultural organizations help build a better and more democratic society?

- Is a community, an individual, or a socioeconomic sector that is more engaged with cultural organizations also one that is more prosperous, healthy, happy, or fulfilled?

- How much social/economic/psychological benefit do the arts generate, compared to other forms of human endeavor that also generate such benefits?

- Given that the value (social, economic, etc.) of an artist's work changes over time, how can we optimize our policies of subsidization and support to maximize the *long-term* social value generated by the arts?

On the question of how preferences, tastes, and demand for cultural experiences change and grow over time, participants also voiced specific questions, including:

o What is the role of 'the arts' in people's lives relative to their other activities and interests? How do Americans typically satisfy their needs for both creative expression and artistic enjoyment?

o How is the perception of what constitutes art, culture, and desirable experiences evolving, and how do nonprofit arts organizations and their offerings fit into these demographic, social, cultural, technological shifts?

o What macro trends in consumer behaviors and public tastes are driving demand for live arts programs and performances? How is audience behavior and consumption changing, at the sector, discipline and individual organizational level?

o How do arts and artistic creativity fit into people's individual and familial value sets? How is this connected to their engagement in arts and artistically creative activity?

o How do people's interactions with, and personal valuing of, arts and artistic endeavors (broadly defined) change over the course of their lives? Why?

o How does an individual come to enjoy an art form or genre that she previously disliked or wasn't aware of (i.e., how does preference discovery happen)?

o What role can artists play in building demand for the arts?

o What motivates some young people to invest their time and their physical presence in the arts as participants rather than merely audiences?

o How do arts organizations that offer live experiences compete effectively with the physical, emotional and intellectual benefits that some potential arts consumers seem to get from digitally intermediated consumption?

In articulating these questions, particularly those about the value of cultural experiences, a few experts in our forum emphasized the importance of finding more rigorous ways of making causal and comparative claims about the impact of culture. Unlike studies in public health, the environment, or some social service sectors, the cultural sector rarely uses experimental or quasi-experimental research design, so causality can't easily be ascribed. (A recent study conducted at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, by University of Arkansas researchers, which shows a causal relationship between museum field trip participation and a host of educational outcomes is a notable exception.) Several noted that this is due to an absence of comparisons, either over time or to domains outside of culture. "I lament the lack of pre- and post-test studies," said one. "We all know that arts and culture are good for you because they make communities better. But 'better' implies improvement over time as well as meaning superior to the competition. Where are the studies that compare communities before and after and can assign some role in the transformation to the arts?" Another argued that "the biggest gap in typical research designs in the sector has to do with considering the

counterfactual. I almost never see research projects apply any kind of control group or even a non-arts comparison analysis. For example, studies that look at the economic contribution of the arts would be tremendously more valuable if they included a comparison to sports, religion, or other industries/occupations."

The path forward

These reflections on cultural data, and the online dialogue that informed them, come at a time of profound technological and social change. The values and conventions associated with cultural production and consumption during the twentieth century have been challenged and in some ways edged aside by new, twenty-first century norms. Where twentieth-century culture was often formal, serious, highly professionalized, and institutional, and was designed for contemplative experience, today's cultural offerings are increasingly informal, playful, participatory, and grassroots or community-based, and are enjoyed as social, often spontaneous experiences. These and other shifts force cultural providers to rethink their relationship to their communities and participants. The shifts also complicate the role that data can and should play in the cultural sphere, for several reasons. Some forms of data, such as the NEA's Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, are necessarily designed as 'lagging indicators,' helping us to take stock of recent behaviors and longer-term historical trends, not to predict coming changes. Other kinds of data, including some quantitative surveys commissioned by individual cultural organizations, derive from questions that cultural practitioners believe to be diagnostic or directional but which may in fact embed dated assumptions about engagement—thereby begging the question of what an arts or cultural experience *could* be and perhaps putting an unintended brake on innovation. Data-informed decision making is only as valuable as the data doing the informing.

Added to those complications is the inherent diversity and complexity of 'the cultural sector' itself. Where we choose to draw the definitional perimeter around that concept (including or excluding for-profit forms of culture? focusing on organizations or also including individual artists, hobbyists, and social participants?) will have a significant impact on what kinds of data we collect and use. Developing a shared, coherent policy regarding cultural data would require us to first grapple with macro-level shifts like those mentioned above and make a host of strategic decisions about the identity and desired future of the sector we're trying to help.

Nonetheless, based on the observations of our participating experts, our own experience as researchers and consultants in the sector, and the experiences of the CDP thus far, we can hazard a few suggestions for the field about the collection and use of cultural data. These suggestions are far from constituting a policy, or even an agenda for the field. But we hope they will be a useful step in the development of a 'data agenda' to help the cultural sector stay relevant and viable in a changing world. We offer them in the belief—reinforced by the online dialogue with our colleagues—that a better-informed cultural ecosystem is a healthier and more adaptable one, and that new approaches will be necessary to help the sector become better informed.

Recommendations

- **Coordinate leadership on cultural data**. To address many of the issues raised in this paper, coordinated leadership will be necessary. Such leadership does not necessarily

need to come from a single, central entity. In fact, the field would likely benefit from concerted but distributed leadership that can authentically build bridges across the different spheres and interests that make up the cultural sector. That kind of big-picture coordination will be especially important to address questions of how data is perceived and valued by culture professionals, how those professionals are trained, and how we can develop a shared language around data-informed decision making. It will also be essential if we hope to set and move forward on an agenda for data collection and research in the cultural sector. It won't be easy. As one contributor said, "Leadership is needed. It will take strength, consensus-building and politics to establish for the whole field a shared research framework, menu of meaningful indicators and field-based data definitions." But it has the potential to transform practice.

- **Include and engage program and artistic staff in the conversation about data**. At the end of the day, the cultural sector is little without the programming at its center. It follows that, until we are using data to inform decision-making about programming, we can't truly be said to be engaging in data-informed decision-making. For understandable reasons, artists and programming staff have long been resistant to the notion that data should inform their choices. As a field, we need to find new ways of collecting and interpreting data that truly support—rather than diminish—the creativity and excitement of programmatic and artistic decision-making, and we can only do that by building bridges between artists and researchers. We repeat the words of one forum contributor: "Until we can engage artists and curators in examining audience, market and trend data, we can never really make progress as a field…. They are the ones who can move the world."

- **Shift the conversation from data's value as an accountability tool to data's value as a decision-making tool.** Cultural data would not be as abundant, nor would the cultural data landscape be as developed as it currently is, if it weren't for the fact that funders require data to assess their grantmaking activity and individual organizations use data to make their case for sustained funding. But the focus on accountability has also limited the scope of the conversation about data's value to the field. It is time to broaden the conversation beyond accountability and reframe the power of data in terms of 'research & development'—a mindset of creative progress and more confident, responsive decision-making, rather than an external reporting duty. Grantmakers have a critical role to play in fostering this shift, and indeed many are already encouraging their grantees to adopt a more expansive notion of evaluation. The conversation should continue in this direction.

- **Develop an agenda for future research and data collection, with clear objectives and a plan of action.** In this paper, we identify a number of potential areas for new research and data collection, including greater research into the value of cultural experiences and cultural organizations and a fresh inquiry into how preferences, tastes, and

demand for cultural experiences change and grow over time. We encourage the field to build on this starting point to develop a coordinated, strategic agenda for knowledge building. This agenda may need to start with calls to fill in some of the gaps in basic data about the sector—including building our fundamental knowledge about the data usage patterns discussed here—before tackling these bigger-picture questions about value and demand-building. Because the sector is so complex—including not just formally established nonprofit entities, but also individual artists and creative producers, community-based arts organizations, and organizations with hybrid corporate structures—it will be important to acknowledge from the outset that no single organization can fill these gaps alone. Coordinated leadership, as discussed above, will be a necessary precursor to building the common vision, shared agenda, and collective action plan that the field needs.

- **<u>Encourage training and professional development in data-related skills</u>.** In order for the cultural sector to become more adept at collecting and using data, there must be more attention paid to, and more investment in, the technical, analytical, and interpretive capacities of those who work in the sector—particularly arts administrators but also consultants, service organization leaders, and funders. This may need to include not just formal professional development for those already in the midst of cultural careers, but a greater emphasis on data- and research-related skills in graduate training for arts administrators and in the selection process for new and emerging leaders.

- **<u>Improve the cultural data infrastructure</u>.** Though we currently collect a great deal of cultural data, the standards and infrastructure for that data collection is in need of a considerable upgrade. Norms about data accuracy are relatively lax throughout the field, a considerable amount of cultural data is inaccessible to those without the most advanced data training, and there are few shared standards for what to collect and how. Advances in technology also need to be aggressively pursued to improve data collection, production, and analysis processes. Investing in improvements in these areas will be critical for diffusing data use practices throughout the sector.

Implications for the Cultural Data Project

Since its launch in 2004, the Cultural Data Project has played an active role in expanding the volume, consistency, and accessibility of cultural data, particularly when it comes to data about individual nonprofit cultural institutions. CDP's platform provides a standardized way for cultural organizations to contribute fundamental financial, programmatic, and operational information to a centralized database about (and for) the sector. As such, CDP is a critical source of cultural data for policymakers, grantmakers, service organizations, and cultural researchers. Said one contributor, "The CDP is, to my mind, the premier example of a long-term consistent attempt to gather, maintain and update basic statistical data on U.S. arts and culture organizations. It isn't sexy, but it recognizes and addresses the fundamental fact that in

order to understand the role of the arts in America you have to build a robust foundation of basic, reliable descriptive information about the organizations that do this kind of work." CDP data serves as a key input for a number of important knowledge-building initiatives throughout the sector, including the new National Center for Arts Research's efforts to integrate multiple cultural data sources into the largest database of arts information, as well as the Sustain Arts initiative at the Hauser Institute for Civil Society at Harvard University, among other projects in pilot stages.

CDP also aims to be a source of data for the leaders and administrators of individual cultural organizations, supporting their development of the kinds of data-informed decision-making practices described in the introduction to this paper. This is an area in which CDP's resources have, however, gone underutilized so far, as noted by a number of forum participants as well as by respondents to CDP's internal survey. In part because contributing information to CDP is often a requirement placed on them by funders, many arts administrators have come to see their CDP reporting as a burdensome task rather than as a valuable undertaking with the power to enhance their own efficiency and effectiveness. While CDP's emphasis on supportive, high-touch service for participating cultural organizations helps mitigate the burden of contributing data and meeting funder requirements (and may be an asset that can be leveraged in providing professional development around data collection and use to the field), by and large, individual organizations feel that the benefits associated with providing data to the CDP are not yet in line with the investment of time and effort required to do so. There is not yet a strong desire within their organizations for tools to improve decision-making, nor is the value of CDP to that end widely recognized. So a key objective of CDP's own strategic planning process is identifying ways to simplify the data production process and maximize its value and relevance to individual cultural organizations.

The CDP has many strengths that could be leveraged in each of the recommended areas identified above. More importantly, it has the potential to play a leadership role in carrying the field-wide conversation forward. One of the CDP's greatest strengths may be its customer service model, which with better technology support could be refocused on providing professional development to the field. One forum contributor noted the critical role that a single service organization like the CDP can—and should—play in professional development: "Organizations want to make effective use of data, but institutional capacity/skills issues get in the way. This is perhaps where the best opportunity for an intermediary or service organization to make an impact lies – in helping organizations and the field as a whole build quality data, organizational capacity, and a well-defined set of field-level questions in order to change the conversation about the benefits of data." Sounding a similar note, a respondent to CDP's internal strategic planning survey noted the organization's inherent strength in this area: "So many foundations and government funders are not available to artists and organizations for help. When you ask questions, you are made to feel like you are stupid or to feel like you are wasting their time. CDP is always available for even the most redundant of questions."

If the CDP does play a leadership role in the steps recommended above, our participating experts strongly underscored the need for the organization to maintain—and even expand on—its current focus. "There needs to be at least one independent organization somewhere in the US whose *primary* focus is on building a robust stock of basic data on arts and culture in the United States, as distinct from being primarily focused on conducting specific research studies related to arts and culture." To fulfill its potential in this regard, the field will need to support CDP in becoming a truly representative sample of the cultural sector. Said one contributor, "While the utility of CDP data is potentially very valuable, the largest limitation is the non-representativeness of the organizations that provide data. For CDP data to be even more useful, a probability sampling mechanism should be utilized to be able to come up with valid estimates of sector-wide operations, or somehow, all arts/culture organizations should provide data." The CDP's current model, which is based on funders requiring their grantees to complete profiles in order to have their grant applications considered, carries with it a selection bias that reduces the value of the resulting dataset.

In closing

To the extent that this discussion touches on the Cultural Data Project itself and how its work could be improved, the CDP leadership team deserves praise for holding that conversation in the public square, so to speak. But this paper is only indirectly about the CDP; it's about how to strengthen the cultural sector at large by improving its relationship to data. Our reflections here are intended to spark a much broader dialogue about how that can happen. We believe the time is ripe for that dialogue: There is palpable interest in data among cultural practitioners, policymakers, funders, and researchers; emerging technologies offer myriad possibilities; inspiring examples from other nonprofit and for-profit sectors abound; and perhaps most importantly, changing economic and cultural conditions have lit new fires under cultural organizations to become more nimble and adaptive—which requires a new empiricism as well as a new spirit of invention.

The cultural data landscape has come a long way in the last few decades, and in the next few decades the pace of progress will only increase. Our task is to harness and guide that progress by thinking strategically and collaboratively about what culture needs and how data can contribute. With further conversation and coordinated leadership, the cultural sector can explore and embrace data-informed decision-making and the opportunities it affords.

Appendix A: Contributors

Alan Brown, Principal, WolfBrown

Alan Brown is a leading researcher and management consultant in the nonprofit arts industry. His work focuses on understanding consumer demand for cultural experiences and helping cultural institutions, foundations, and agencies see new opportunities, make informed decisions, and respond to changing conditions. Mr. Brown's current research efforts include a project commissioned by Grantmakers in the Arts to develop a new national benchmarking system for tracking institutional support of individual artists; and, in partnership with Arthur Nacht, a multi-year evaluation of Nonprofit Finance Fund's Leading For The Future initiative, a groundbreaking grant program building on the principles of capitalization to transform nonprofit arts organizations. He is the founder of CultureLab, a partnership between the Cultural Policy Center at the University of Chicago and an international consortium of arts consultants that aims to build a bridge between academic research and everyday practice, and to speed the diffusion of promising practice into the cultural sector. Mr. Brown has served on the organizing committee of the National Arts Marketing Project annual conference since its inception, and speaks frequently at conferences in the U.S. and overseas.

John W. Jacobsen, CEO, White Oak Institute and President, White Oak Associates, Inc

John W. Jacobsen, CEO of the White Oak Institute and president of White Oak Associates, Inc, has led White Oak's museum analysis and strategic planning for over a hundred museums and hundreds of commissions. Recent projects represent over a billion dollars of actual and anticipated investment in new and expanding museums internationally. White Oak executive produced the Oscar®-nominated The Living Sea, which is also in the IMAX Hall of Fame. Jacobsen was associate director of the Museum of Science in Boston in the 1980's where he executive produced their highly successful new wing and Mugar Omni Theater. During that launch year, which also included the Ramses the Great exhibition, the Museum served 2.2 million visitors, an unsurpassed record. Mr. Jacobsen managed the Museum Film Network ('87-8), and founded the Ocean Film Network ('92), AAM's Professional Committee on Green Museums (PIC Green '08) and the Digital Immersive Giant Screen Specifications (DIGSS 1.0 '11). With Ms. Jeanie Stahl, Mr. Jacobsen formed the White Oak Institute in 2007, a non-profit dedicated to research-based museum innovation, with completed awards and contracts with the NSF, the IMLS, the AAM and the ACM. Mr. Jacobsen was the Principal Investigator on DISCUSS (NSF ISE 0946691), which developed the Digital Immersive Giant Screen Specifications (DIGGS). His BA and MFA are from Yale University.

Roland J. Kushner, Associate Professor of Business, Muhlenberg College

Roland J. Kushner joined the Muhlenberg College Department of Accounting, Business, Economics & Finance in 2006. He teaches management, small business management, arts administration, nonprofit management, and the business capstone course in strategic management. He has a B.A. (History) from Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, and M.B.A. and Ph.D. from Lehigh University in Bethlehem, PA. His career includes success as founding Managing Director of Bethlehem Musikfest, Development Director for Bethlehem Bach Choir; founder and President of Rose Garden Children's Festival; and Interim Executive Director of NPR affiliate WDIY-FM. Consulting and research clients include American Red Cross International Services, RAND, Urban Institute, Americans for the Arts, Chorus America, and C.F. Martin & Co. He researches strategic management and organizational performance challenges in nonprofit organizations, and the economics of cultural industries. His work has been published in Journal of Cultural Economics, Nonprofit Management & Leadership, International Journal of Arts Management, Journal of Arts Management, Law & Society, and by Brookings Institution Press. Since 2010, he and Randy Cohen have written the annual "National Arts Index: An Annual Measure of the Vitality of Arts and Culture in the United States," published by Americans for the Arts. Since 2006, he has compiled Chorus America's annual Choral Operations Survey Report.

Lawrence T. McGill, Vice President for Research, The Foundation Center

Since joining the Foundation Center in 2007, Lawrence T. McGill has significantly expanded the Center's research capacity while continuing to produce definitive analyses of philanthropic sector trends. Previously, McGill was Director of Research and Planning for the Cultural Policy & the Arts National Data Archive (CPANDA) and Deputy Director of the Princeton University Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies. His work with CPANDA involved identifying, evaluating, and analyzing key social science datasets for inclusion in the archive, on topics related to artists, arts audiences, arts organizations, and public support for the arts; by the end of 2006, the archive held more than 200 such datasets. Mr. McGill also served as Director of Research for the Freedom Forum and as Manager of News Audience Research for NBC. He has consulted on research projects with the Urban Institute; the Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy at Vanderbilt University; the National Arts Journalism Program at Columbia University; the Columbia University department of art and architectural history; the Institute of Fine Arts (NYU); the American Society of Newspaper Editors; and NBC News and CBS News, among other organizations. Mr. McGill has taught in the departments of sociology and journalism at Northwestern University, where he received his Ph.D.

Ian David Moss, Research Director, Fractured Atlas

As Research Director for Fractured Atlas, Ian David Moss supports the field by harnessing the power of data to drive informed decision-making in the arts. Evidence-based strategic frameworks that Mr. Moss helped create have guided the distribution of more than $60 million in grants to date by two of the nation's most important arts funders, and he is currently working as an internal consultant to develop a comprehensive measurement and performance assessment plan for Fractured Atlas. Mr. Moss designed and leads implementation of Fractured Atlas's pioneering cultural asset mapping software, Archipelago, which visualizes information about creative activities in a particular geography. Since 2007, he has been editor of Createquity, a highly acclaimed arts policy blog. More recently, he was the driving force behind the creation of the Cultural Research Network, an open resource-sharing forum for self-identified researchers in the arts with hundreds of members to date. He founded C4: The Composer/Conductor Collective in 2005, the first organization of its kind and the largest chorus exclusively singing music written in the past 25 years, and he currently serves on its board of directors. Ian has been named one of the top leaders in the nonprofit arts sector by his peers and is in demand as a writer, editor, speaker, grant panelist, consultant, and guest lecturer. He holds BA and MBA degrees from Yale University and is based in Washington, DC.

Susan Nelson, Principal, TDC

Susan Nelson, Principal, has been with TDC since 1987. She has worked with organizations across the country in areas such as arts and culture, community development, education, and youth development. Her client engagements have included mergers, strategic and business planning, facilities planning, new project development plans, organizational and financial assessments, and financial restructuring. Ms. Nelson has led several ground breaking initiatives on the capitalization issues that face the arts and culture sector. This work has been sponsored by major funders including the Pew Charitable Trusts, the William Penn Foundation, the Kresge Foundation, the Boston Foundation, the Barr Foundation, and the Fidelity Foundation. Her publications have included: "Getting Beyond Breakeven" (2010), "Vital Signs: Metro Boston's Arts and Cultural Nonprofits" (2008), and "The Risk of Debt in Financing Nonprofit Facilities: Why Your Business Model Matters"(2007). Over the course of her work with both clients and funders she has delved deeply into a wide range of organizational and sector level data. She is a prominent voice for best practices in the application of data to organizational and funding decisions.

Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, Principal, Metris Art Consulting

As a researcher, writer, speaker, and advocate, Anne Gadwa Nicodemus tells stories through narratives and numbers. A choreographer/arts administrator turned urban planner, Ms. Nicodemus is a leading voice in the intersection of arts and community development. She co-authored Creative Placemaking, the report for the Mayors' Institute of City Design (2010) that defined the field. Her journal article "Fuzzy Vibrancy" (Cultural Trends, 2013) and forthcoming

book, The Creative Placemakers' Playbook, look more deeply at creative placemaking as cultural policy and its ethics and practical challenges. Ms. Nicodemus' short writings have also appeared in publications including Grantmakers in the Arts: Reader, Createquity, and Minnesota Public Radio News. She speaks widely on creative placemaking and artist spaces, giving frequent talks at universities and professional conferences nationwide, and as far-flung as Macau, China and Ontario. Ms. Nicodemus was recognized as one of the nation's fifty most influential people in the nonprofit arts in 2012 and 2013. She holds a Masters of Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs and a B.A. in dance and biology from Oberlin College.

Jennifer Novak-Leonard, Research Manager, Cultural Policy Center at the University of Chicago

Jennifer Novak-Leonard specializes in evolving measurement systems to understand cultural participation, and the personal and public value derived from those experiences. Her work lies at the nexus between research, policy and practice. Currently, Ms. Novak-Leonard is a principal investigator of the California Survey of Arts Participation at NORC, commissioned by the James Irvine Foundation. The survey captures a more extensive range of artistic activities than has previously been measured in scientific surveys. Funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, she is currently examining motivations for and barriers to arts attendance as measured by the most recent General Social Survey. Ms. Novak-Leonard leads projects on artists' education and employment, public funding, and arts in immigrant communities at the Cultural Policy Center at the University of Chicago, where she is the 2013-14 Research Manager. She also lectures at the University of Chicago's Harris School of Public Policy and currently serves on the Cultural Data Project's Research Advisory Committee. Previously, Ms. Novak-Leonard was a Senior Consultant with WolfBrown and an Assistant Policy Analyst at the RAND Corporation. She is the lead author of "Beyond Attendance: A Multi-Modal Understanding of Arts Participation" (NEA, 2011). Select publications include: "Measuring the intrinsic impacts of arts attendance" (Cultural Trends, 2013); "Cultural Engagement in California's Inland Regions" (WolfBrown, 2008), "Arts and Culture in the Metropolis" (RAND, 2007) and, as a contributor, "Gifts of the Muse "(RAND, 2004).

Zannie Giraud Voss, Director, National Center for Arts Research

Zannie Giraud Voss is Chair and Professor of Arts Management and Arts Entrepreneurship in the Meadows School of the Arts and Cox School of Business at Southern Methodist University, and an affiliate professor at Kedge School of Business in Marseille. Previously, she was a Professor at Duke University in Theatre Studies and the Fuqua School of Business. Before transitioning to academia, Ms. Voss was Managing Director of PlayMakers Repertory Company, Associate Manager of the Alley Theatre, and Assistant Director of Audience Development at the Mark Taper Forum. She has served as a consultant for the Irvine Foundation, Theatre Development Fund, Philadelphia Theatre Initiative, the National Endowment for the Arts, and Theatre Communications Group. Voss has also published articles

in academic and practitioner journals on research examining the strategic factors that influence organizational performance in the arts using multiple stakeholder measures. She is on the Scientific Committee of the International Association of Arts and Cultural Management, Associate Editor of the *International Journal of Arts Management*, and a Board Member of Big Thought, the Cultural Data Project, and TACA (The Arts Community Alliance). Ms. Voss is co-author of the book *Outrageous Fortune: The Life and Times of the New American Play*, published by Theatre Development Fund.

Joanna Woronkowicz, Assistant Professor, School of Public and Environmental Affairs, Indiana University

Ms. Woronkowicz is an assistant professor in the School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University in Bloomington, an adjunct assistant professor at the Lilly School of Philanthropy at Indiana University-Purdue University in Indianapolis, and a Research Associate at the Cultural Policy Center at the University of Chicago. Previously, she served as the Senior Research Officer at the National Endowment for the Arts, and has held research positions at NORC at the University of Chicago and in the Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy at the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C. Ms. Woronkowicz conducts research in the fields of economics and policy, particularly relating to culture and the arts, urban development, and the nonprofit sector. At Indiana University, she teaches classes in public policy, nonprofit management, and arts administration. Ms. Woronkowicz received her Ph.D. in Public Policy from the University of Chicago, with a special emphasis on applied econometric methods and survey methodology.

Margaret Wyszomirski, Faculty Professor, Department of Arts Administration, Education and Public Policy, Ohio State University

Margaret Wyszomirski is a faculty member of both the Department of Arts Administration, Education, and Policy and the John Glenn School of Public Affairs at Ohio State University. She has served as Staff Director for the bipartisan Independent Commission on the National Endowment for the Arts; Director of the Office of Policy Planning, Research, and Budget at the National Endowment for the Arts; and Director of the Graduate Public Policy Program at Georgetown University. Ms. Wyszomirski has served on national advisory committees for a Foundation Center analysis of arts funding, for the economic impact study of arts and tourism conducted by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, and for the National Center for Charitable Statistics. She was a founding member of the Research Advisory Committee of the American Council for the Arts, and was Chair of the Steering Committee for the 1997 American Assembly on "The Arts and the Public Purpose." Ms. Wyszomirski has been a member of the editorial boards of Cultural Trends, Nonprofit Management and Leadership, Review of Policy Research, Artivate, and an executive editor of Journal of Arts Management, Law and Society. She was Chair of the Research Task Force of the Center for Arts and Culture in Washington, DC from 1999–2002.

Appendix B: A Taxonomy of Cultural Databases

Excerpted from "An Overview of the Cultural Data Landscape" prepared for the Cultural Data Project by Margaret Wyszomirski

Common Types of Cultural Databases:

1. **National economic performance data.** In general, data on many social organizational, and economic phenomena distinguish between *performance* data, *behavior data* and *opinion/attitude* data. Cultural data regarding organizational performance and individual behavior is relatively abundant, while opinion/attitudinal data are less plentiful. Some of the earliest efforts to collect data on the arts rode the coattails of larger information gathering activities developed by actors outside the arts sector. These included data gathering efforts of the U.S. government specifically by the U.S. Census, the US. Commerce Department, and the US Labor Department _regarding national economic performance_.

   Before the establishment of direct public support for the arts in the mid-1960s, these were some of the relatively few sources of national, public data on the arts. The US Commerce Department had been collecting information on national income and product accounts since 1929 and determined the contribution that a select—mostly commercial cultural industries and popular culture industries—made to the GNP. This might be considered a precursor of data on the economic impact of the arts and on the dimensions of the creative and cultural industries. The U.S. Census Bureau collected information on the receipts of firms that were both subject to and exempt from federal income tax—which provided some detail on revenue amounts and sources regarding nonprofit arts organizations. Again, information that would prove useful in beginning to understand the relative dimensions of the nonprofit and the commercial arts. In addition, the U.S. Census Bureau collected information on arts workers and their earnings—a foundation for the study of artist occupations. They had also gathered information on the personal consumption patterns of Americans for entertainment. This might be considered an early aspect of audience and market research about the arts. Such efforts were but a small part of the government's efforts to understand and track the dimensions and trends of the U.S. economy, and were instituted at a time when the agricultural and manufacturing segments of the economy were dominant and the service sector, including the activities of nonprofit organizations, were little noticed.

2. **Grant-making and grant management data.** Other efforts arose around philanthropic giving particularly as foundations sought to _track their grantmaking_ and professionalize their field—with cultural philanthropy being just one target of private giving. In the mid-1950s, efforts to track private philanthropic giving patterns—of individual, corporations and foundations—and what they gave to, began to develop with the establishment of three key organizations, each of which undertook particular information gathering activities The American Association of Fund-Raising Council began collecting and information in the

Giving USA report, which started in 1957, has been published annually for the past 57 years. The report provides a rigorous, comprehensive picture of American philanthropy, including donative support for the arts. At about same time, the Foundation Center was established (1956) to inform the field of foundations on the activities of its members. Today the Foundation Center "maintains the most comprehensive database on U.S. and, increasingly, global grantmakers and their grants"(FC website-about us). Finally , after a short gestation period, the Council of Foundations emerged as the national service organization of grant-making foundations which sought to collect information on the practices among foundations and to develop information that would further the professional development of foundation staff and good management practices and standards for foundation management. One should remember that also in the mid-1950s, most nonprofit arts organizations were supported almost solely by wealthy individual patrons. This began to change with the entrance of the Ford Foundation into arts funding in a significant and long-term way that paved the way for other foundations to enter the arts and encouraged the participation of other funding sectors (Ford Working paper p 15). Thus symptomatic of diversifying foundation interests and a quest for better transparency, accountability, and program planning, foundations sought information to inform their practice and advocacy. Since giving to the arts was an integral part of foundation activity, these information gathering efforts are also of interest to the cultural data universe.

As public arts funding was established and expanded at the federal, state and local levels between 1966 and 1976, another purpose for information gathering emerged—tracking public funding, tracking public arts grantmaking, and providing evidence for arts advocacy, specifically for increased annual appropriations. During the second half of the 1970 and the beginning of the 1980s, an information gathering infrastructure concerning public "arts patronage" was put into place. In 1974, the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) came into existence to represent what was now a full complement of public arts agencies serving every state and the several US territories. The first kinds of information NASAA began to track was the budget of each state arts agency. The annual appropriations of each state arts agency have been gathered since 1966. Eventually, NASAA would add information on per capita arts spending in each state, rankings of state arts support by annual appropriations amount as well as per capita, and also track arts related line item appropriations in each state. It took NASAA until the early 1980s to develop a more detailed grant management capacity to track grantgiving by arts discipline, as well as the number of grants, the number and type of grantees, the share of all SAA grants awarded nationally in terms of state and of discipline and the type of activity funded. This was accomplished through the development of the National Standard for Arts Information Exchange, which was one of the first national databases designed to gather information across the range of arts disciplines and nonprofit arts organizations. Although this covered only one stream of revenue for arts organizations, it made a valuable contribution to how and why we were coming to design cultural databases.

3. **Field practice data.** Another type of early effort was characterized by the desire of specific kinds of arts organizations and arts practitioners to better understand *financial and management conditions in their fields and to professionalize their practices, earnings, benefits, and working conditions*. These information gathering efforts were undertaken by some of the relatively few national arts service organization that existed before the establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts. Similar efforts became a standard function of national arts service organizations and their number and size grew during the 1970s and 1980s.

Before the advent of public support for the arts, the main national sources of data on the arts—especially nonprofit arts organizations—was gathered by the various arts service organizations. Only a few such professional organizations predated the arts endowment—such as the American Symphony Orchestra League (ASOL, now LAO), the American Association of Museums (AAM), or the Theatre Communication Group (TCG)—or artist unions—such the American Federation of Musicians (AFM) and Actors Equity. Even venerable associations like the AAM collected data but did not compile what we would consider a data base. The museum field experimented three times in the 1970s to conduct a detailed and comprehensive survey of American museums—inl1971, 1974, and 1979. But as late as 1975, former AAM President, Charles Parkhurst could assert that there was "no entirely satisfactory list of art museums" and that the closest information resource was The Official Museum Directory" (p70-Amer Assbly, on understanding art museums). But it still took over a decade for the museum field to design and undertake such a comprehensive data collection organized into a rudimentary database. In 1984, the AAM's landmark report Museums for a New Century complained that its work had been hindered by the

> "lack of information about museum professions" adding that 'there is no reliable data on the characteristics of the museum workforce, the availability of various kinds of public programming or the financial picture of American museums….even such simple information as the number, type, budget size, and regional distribution of museums is not regularly maintained." (Museums Count p.18)

Finally, in a large, random sample survey was undertaken in 1989, and the AAM published the *Data Report* in 1992, followed by a more accessible analysis in 1994 as *Museums Count*. As the reports acknowledge, one of the reasons why such information was lacking and took so much time to gather was that the association lacked the financial resources and the methodological skills to undertake such a large research project. Although AAM had tried working with the National Center for Education Statistics (1971) and with the NEA who hired Louis Harris Associates in 1974, they were not equipped to hire their own survey consultants and work with them to design the survey that met what they felt where the field's information needs. Project support required securing grants from a collection of federal agencies (NEA, NEH, NSF, and IMS) foundations, and corporate sponsor Phillip Morris. Neither the 1989 survey Data Report nor the public report, Museums Count, made any reference to data in any easily manipulable form being available to researchers outside AAM.

Indeed, the AAM can be considered emblematic of initial information gathering attempts of many arts service organizations—most started out by collecting data and presenting it in the form of a field directory. This illustrates that there is an important distinction between data—which is" a collection of factual information used as a basis for reasoning and discussion" and a database which is" usually a large collection of data organized especially for rapid search and retrieval"(Merriam Webster online). A common evolution of the membership directory became the annual financial survey which collected organizational financial information regarding revenue streams (both private and public), operating expenses, employee information, endowment, etc. A similar information gathering and reporting practice can be seen in the annual *Orchestra Statistics Report* issued by the League of American Orchestras and was adopted by new associations such as Dance/USA and Opera America. Since its founding in 1981, Opera America has developed an extensive suite of directories and surveys including a production directory, a membership directory, an annual repertory in performance directory and recently has undertaken surveys on Future season programming, on the educational activities of opera companies, and a human resources survey that covers not only salaries and benefits but also the demographics of staff and boards. Other special studies surveys are also undertaken on topics ranging from board training, recruitment and governance; on salaries; on capital projects; and on succession, to name but a few. While the results of such data collection efforts was commonly published and shared primarily with association members and supporting/funding organizations, the databases themselves are not generally or widely available outside of the association itself.

4. **Market behavior data/arts participation.** A final common information gathering effort concerns the arts market which has generally taken the form of audience and/or arts participation survey research. Originally, individual arts organizations would conduct their own audience research. This practice was well document and critically reviewed in a 1978 Arts Endowment Research Report (#9) entitled *Audience Studies of the Performing Arts and Museums: A Critical Review and* undertaken by Paul DiMaggio, Michael Useem and Paula Brown. The project located 270 completed audience studies that were undertaken by a either specific arts institutions or by individual arts researchers. This review helped set a foundation for the development of the recurring Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA) that has been undertaken by the Arts Endowment in partnership with the US Census. The 1978 research report indicated that 265 of the surveys collected from the field were organized as a study collection that was available through the NEA Library.

Since 1982, the SPPA survey has been fielded many times and each time has amassed one of the largest response samples in cultural data. The datasets of this information have been made available to other researchers and analysts both from the Endowment and, after its establishment, at the CPANDA archive. In addition, over the years, the arts endowment commissioned numerous topical reports using the SPPA data to explore topics like the geography of arts participation, age cohort patterns, media participation in the arts,

changes over time, and differences among art forms. In addition, many communities have commissioned consultant research about community arts markets and arts service organizations have also, on occasion, undertaken discipline specific arts audience research such as the League of American Orchestras' *Audience Motivation Study* and its *Audience Demographic Research Review (2009).*