

# SOMETHING TO SAY

SUCCESS PRINCIPLES *for* AFTERSCHOOL  
ARTS PROGRAMS *from* URBAN YOUTH  
*and* OTHER EXPERTS

Denise Montgomery • Peter Rogouin  
Neromanie Persaud



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Cover photo: Two young actors perform in the youth-written play *Wings to Fly* as part of the SAY Sí youth arts program in San Antonio. Photo courtesy of SAY Sí.

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*Among the offerings at SAY Si in San Antonio is a year-round Saturday program for middle school students in visual and media arts. Photo courtesy of SAY Si.*

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# FOREWORD

A

nyone who has attended a child's dance recital or photography exhibit knows the magic that happens when young people get the chance to embrace their creativity and show off their hard work.

For many of our country's poorest children, however, such opportunities are not a part of daily life. At The Wallace Foundation, we believe the arts belong to everyone, regardless of age, income or background. We commissioned this study to help program providers understand how to bring high-quality arts experiences to more youngsters from disadvantaged urban areas.

Engagement in the arts not only allows young people to express themselves and unleash the power of their imaginations but can also build skills and confidence; foster teamwork and persistence; and inspire the formation of social bonds, empathy for others and a capacity for delight that can last a lifetime. High-quality arts programming can be particularly meaningful to "tweens," ages 10-13, who are navigating the transition from childhood to their more independent, but also demanding, teen years.

And yet, in low-income urban communities an array of barriers stands between tweens and the arts. We know that the emphasis on testing in reading and math has caused many public schools to jettison "extras" such as band and drama. For this report, we wanted to learn what tweens think about afterschool arts programs and the factors that inform their decision to participate or not.

So we engaged a marketing strategy and insights firm, Next Level SMG, to ask them. Researchers went to cities across the nation and spoke to hundreds of young people in their homes and neighborhoods. They also sought views from their families, the directors of exemplary programs and experts in youth arts instruction.

What do tweens *want* in an arts program? How does that stack up against what the experts say they *need*? What have successful programs figured out about converting skeptical first-time visitors into passionately committed student artists?

The research shed light on both the challenges involved in attracting tweens to participate in afterschool arts programming and a set of promising practices that suggest ways to address them. Among the challenges: The very term "arts" can be a turnoff, thought by tweens to refer only to the visual arts and museum visits; their parents may better understand the benefits of sports than the benefits of arts; and – perhaps little surprise to anyone who has ever supervised a 13-year-old – tweens can be fickle, opting one minute to explore the arts with enthusiasm, the next minute to leave a structured arts program. To help overcome these barriers, the report also offers practical guidance – distilled as 10 recommended principles for success – to those ready to take on the challenge.

We hope you will find these and other insights compelling and useful. We believe they demonstrate that it is both vital and possible to engage tweens in the arts.

Our young people have something to say; it's up to us to listen, learn and act.



Will Miller,  
President, The Wallace Foundation

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**E**ngagement in the arts can help youth in myriad ways: as a vehicle for self-expression, acquiring skills, and developing focus and teamwork. Unfortunately, with the decline of arts education in public schools, few urban, low-income young people have high-quality, engaging arts experiences at school. Alternatives outside of school, such as private lessons or arts camps, are typically limited to children of families with the resources and savvy to get access to them. What narrow arts experiences low-income youth have are often dull arts and crafts projects where they are instructed to follow a prototype, rather than create something from their own imagination.

Consequently, many urban, low-income youth grow up without even a cursory understanding of what high-quality arts programs are like, or what benefits may accrue from participation. Even when there is awareness or interest in out-of-school time (OST) arts programs, many young people choose other activities for a variety of reasons. Further, community groups often report a steep drop-off in teen OST engagement and participation. That finding points to the importance of captivating young people's interest prior to the teen years when, as tweens,<sup>1</sup> they are more willing to try new OST activities. However, many OST programs are not designing or promoting their arts programs in ways that will be particularly engaging to tweens.

This set of challenges led The Wallace Foundation to ask:

- How can urban, low-income tweens and teens gain equal access to high-quality arts experiences?
- Is there a model of practices that could provide a blueprint for community-based organizations to emulate, so that proven approaches could be deployed in more places, more often?
- Is there a way to approach the analysis of these problems that respects and honors the young

<sup>1</sup> Tweens were defined in the research as fifth- through eighth-graders, generally corresponding to pre-adolescence and chronological age of 10-13.

people as consumers who make informed choices? And how do the insights of what tweens and teens *want* align with what other experts say they *need*?

*Something to Say: Success Principles for Afterschool Arts Programs from Urban Youth and Other Experts* endeavors to answer these questions. The primary way we approached this project was by seeing youth as consumers of OST activities, and taking many of our questions directly to them. In our research we spoke to young people in their neighborhoods and homes, interviewed researchers and youth development practitioners, visited highly effective programs, and combed the research to address some of the key knowledge gaps in the field of OST arts activities for urban, low-income tweens and teens.

## Examining Both Supply and Demand

The prevailing approach to addressing lack of participation has been to view it as an issue of limited supply. Those wishing to address inequities in OST arts participation ask: "What can we supply the market with (e.g., programs, teachers, underwriting) that changes the status quo?" But this question assumes the problem is only one of unmet demand, that "if we build it, they will come."

But such a supply-oriented approach is only part of the solution. A more balanced and comprehensive method lies in pairing supply solutions with a stronger consumer demand orientation. Effective marketers seek to understand what their potential customers want and how they make their decisions, and then do what is necessary to meet those needs and desires. As applied to OST arts, we might ask whether the market need might not be simply more programs, but rather *different kinds* of programs.

Businesses often do consumer research with tweens and teens, but they rarely make such research public out of competitive interest. Our study offers an unusual public glimpse of what influences urban, low-income youth as consumers in how to spend their free time and make decisions about their various choices. In order for youth to choose to par-

ticipate in existing or future OST programs, they must be motivated to do so against a range of alternative choices. Interest in gaining firsthand understanding of youths' specific needs and perspectives was a critical driver in this initiative's goal: to provide a foundation of knowledge from which not-for-profit organizations that serve in urban, low-income communities may develop or refine effective, engaging and accessible arts programs.

### **Research With Tweens and Teens Reveals Compounding Obstacles to Afterschool Arts Program Participation**

The research uncovered a set of obstacles facing programs trying to serve young people on the cusp of engagement, as well as opportunities for reaching such youth. While there is no guarantee that addressing these issues will increase engagement dramatically, their elimination, mitigation or management is a logical place to start.

Young people who are moderately engaged in the arts are the main focus of this project. They enjoy the arts, are open to exploring existing interests, or building new ones, and have likely dabbled in arts through a structured or casual setting. The youth in our research were not rejecters of the arts, and most were not passionate embracers either. For most, their desire to be creative shapes their choice of out-of-school activities, but they are not yet sure what role they want the arts to play in their lives.

We found youth and parent research participants through postings in grocery stores, churches and community centers in low-income urban areas. Participants talked with us in focus groups, as well as in interviews in their homes, both solo and with one or two of their friends. They maintained photo journals that documented a week in their lives, allowing us a glimpse into their unique worlds and minds.

The key insights emerging from hundreds of hours of discussions, interviews and analysis suggest, as expected, a challenging situation. But they also define a potential pathway to higher engagement in the arts. The three key insights are:

1. Multiple barriers limit demand for structured arts programming.
2. Tweens exert a high degree of control in choosing their out-of-school time (OST) activities and are prone to rapid disengagement.
3. Youth want five key features in structured arts programs.

## **1. Multiple Barriers Limit Demand for Structured Arts Programming**

Limited exposure to high-quality OST arts programs compounded by emotional, social and practical barriers negatively influence young people's decisions about whether to participate in an arts program. Among the barriers limiting demand for structured programming are the following:

### **'THE ARTS' TERMINOLOGY**

The young people in our study connected the term "the arts" primarily with visual art, specifically painting and drawing. They did not easily associate the terminology *arts* or *arts programs* with activities such as dancing, singing, design, digital media, or beat-making, which they indicated held significantly more appeal for them. They also often indicated an association with *arts and crafts*, a term that carries its own negative baggage, perceived to be boring and for younger kids. Programs that market their offerings to young people as "arts" may well be communicating a set of limited activities or negative associations that results in avoidance or apathy rather than engagement.

### **INFORMAL OST CREATIVE EXPRESSION**

Tweens revealed in the focus groups they often enjoyed arts activities outside of a structured format. Such young people viewed their art as a private pursuit, and others indicated that the rules, expectations, and oversight of formal programs did not appeal to them.

### **HIGH PERSONAL PERMISSION BARRIERS**

Even before practical barriers like cost and transportation are considered, participation in any program is often predicated on two foundational factors: a positive view of the activity, and whether the individual sees himself or herself as a likely successful participant. (Success can take on several forms: fun, mastery, social status and admiration, etc.) Unfortunately, the reference points for many of the tweens we spoke to offered little positive input, as youth recounted tedious, arts- and crafts-style programs and not being allowed to have autonomy over their personal expression. As a result, they had a hard time imagining themselves enjoying or being fulfilled by a structured OST arts program.

### **DESIRE TO CONFORM, AND LOW SOCIAL 'COST' OF NON-ENGAGEMENT**

Tweens want to conform to what they perceive as normal for their peer group. This inclination is known as a concern with descriptive norms. Because tweens said they believed that most of their peers are not involved in the arts, non-participation is the perceived norm within their social circles. As a result, their desire to conform to norms

supports non-participation and creates a higher social cost or risk to arts engagement.

### **PARENTS DO NOT ASSOCIATE ARTS WITH HIGHER ORDER GOALS**

Most of the parents who participated in the research do not view involvement in the arts as advancing life skills or career goals. Consequently, few seem concerned about their children's lack of engagement, and most said they would not insist that their child continue with arts if the tween felt like quitting. In contrast, parents shared a fantasy indulgence around sports, with a surprising number confidently asserting their child someday would be a multimillionaire professional athlete, resulting in participation in sports being broadly viewed as a higher-yield activity that youth were encouraged to pursue and sustain.

### **WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY WITH YOUNG TWEENS**

While not every young person had all of these factors in play in their lives, they often experienced several, and the various barriers worked in concert with each other to produce a deterrent to participation. There were some minor distinctions in the prevalence of factors among subgroups, which are highlighted later in the *Something to Say* report, but overwhelmingly the emerging theme was one of significant headwinds to participation. One distinction we note that cut across gender, geography and ethnicity is the greater opportunity to engage young tweens (fifth and sixth graders) in OST arts programs. In addition to being less influenced by peer pressure than their seventh and eighth grade counterparts, that group showed much more willingness to try and fail, and to participate. Such openness suggests some of the social and personal identity barriers are not in full force yet, so there may be more opportunities to shape fifth and sixth graders' perceptions of OST arts programs, mitigate barriers, and get them meaningfully involved in activities that are designed to engage and sustain participation.

## **2. High Degree of Tween Control in Choosing Out-of-School Time Activities, Proclivity for Rapid Disengagement**

Decision-making in tween years shifts from parents to their children. Therefore, programs that wish to engage and enroll young people in this age group need to adjust their marketing messages from appealing directly to the parent, as they might for a pre-tween program, to empowering the tween to initiate a successful dialogue with his or her parents.

Additionally, tweens can choose to drop out of an OST activity for a number of reasons, from boredom to the preference of a competing interest, with few consequences. The advent

of mobile communications and social media means tweens have access to an unending stream of information about social circles, activities, and whereabouts of their friends, which is both a distraction from and a veritable menu of alternatives to structured OST activities. Tweens' interest need only wane a little before they start looking for what feels like the next best thing, disengaging from the current activity to focus on a competing diversion, such as hanging with their friends or virtual connections via their smartphones. Programs can combat the low threshold for disengagement by involving youth quickly, for example, offering hands-on experience with equipment or the opportunity to participate in the art form, such as dancing or drawing, within the first half hour of the first program session.

### **OPPORTUNITY – TRIAL PERIODS AND DEMONSTRATIONS**

Numerous tween and teen research participants mentioned that trial program sessions and demonstrations could be an effective way to attract their participation. Tweens saw the option of a trial as a signal that the onus was on the instructor to make the program engaging and attract participants. With demonstrations, such as a brief performance in a school or community center, tweens can see young people—ideally those to whom they can relate—having fun and displaying mastery of a skill. This, in turn, creates interest and excitement, and that can lead to trial or full enrollment.

## **3. Youth Want Specific Features in Structured Arts Programs**

The tweens and teens we spoke with in our research were consistent and clear about what they want in out-of-school time arts programs. The elements they are looking for include: **professional and expert instructors, experiential learning in inspiring spaces, the prospect of new friends focused on similar interests, culminating and competitive events, and program extras and proven incentives** such as snacks and markers of involvement like T-shirts.

We derived these criteria from respondents' stated and latent needs. In the context of our research, a stated need was an explicit request, often accompanied by reference points to past experiences. For example, when young people insisted on having expert instructors, they usually related that to a time when they had an expert guiding an OST activity and found it invaluable, or when their instructor was *not* expert, and the effect on the experience was noticeable.

Latent needs are the underlying drivers of behavior; they are called latent or derived needs because respondents do not state them outright, but may arrive at them through

probes about why something is important. For example, many young people said they wanted rules and no yelling; when asked why, they said to keep things orderly; and when asked why that was important, they revealed they wanted to engage in their art without fear of ridicule or harassment, leading to a derived or latent need for emotional and physical safety.

Researchers often view latent needs as more indicative of true motivation and resultant behavior than stated needs, which are sometimes mentioned simply because they are top of mind or expected (like consumers who mention safety as their main need in a car, even if, in reality, their purchases are based more on styling or brand reputation). Skilled probing of why something is important often reveals the closely held values and beliefs that most correspond to behavior. Although many stated and latent needs are detailed in the full report, the five issues that consistently generated the most potent discussions were:

#### **PROFESSIONAL AND EXPERT INSTRUCTORS**

Young people want instructors whose expertise was rooted in real-world experience; across the board, these adults held more credibility to teach, critique, and inspire.

#### **EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN INSPIRING SPACES**

Respondents spoke at length about how they wanted programs that were immediately immersive, where they were learning by doing, and the instructional space was open, engaging and well suited to their desired levels of interaction with the art, instructor and each other.

#### **PROSPECT OF NEW FRIENDS FOCUSED ON SIMILAR INTERESTS**

Meeting new people is a key driver of participation, and since many young people said their school friends did not participate in the art form they liked, the opportunity to connect with like-minded peers, even if (sometimes especially if) they are from a different school was motivating.

#### **CULMINATING AND COMPETITIVE EVENTS**

Ending a program with a public event to showcase their work is a common desire among young people. Many referenced sports competitions or elimination-based TV shows as providing a format that brings out their best and is engaging and motivating.

#### **PROGRAM EXTRAS AND PROVEN INCENTIVES**

Snacks and meals are a powerful draw, as are markers of membership and recognition, such as T-shirts and certificates. Our research also explored the powerful role of rituals that, while not outward markers of involvement, create a sense of belonging and inclusion.

## **Tween Insights Summary**

Overall, among urban tweens with moderate levels of interest in arts, demand for structured programming is low, but the desire for exceptional experiences is high—leaving the door wide open for organizations to provide tweens the kinds of programs that are built around their clearly expressed needs.

To build on existing interest and encourage enrollment in or trial of a program, organizations must go beyond communicating the availability of an arts activity; they need to interest a young person in a type of experience. Through specific descriptions, they should make clear they are offering certain pursuits and content that tweens probably wouldn't assume to be part of an arts program. Organizations must let tweens know they will not be lectured to, nor will they be enrolling in an arts-and-crafts class. Most of all, programs must convey that this will be a high-level experience allowing for discovery, as well as social opportunities, and giving older youth the chance to have input and some autonomy.

## **10 Principles for Effective, High-Quality OST Arts Programs**

Our research on what we refer to as the “supply-side” – interviews with researchers and youth development practitioners, as well as observations from a sampling of some of the best youth development arts organizations in the country – was run separately and in parallel to the demand (“consumer”) research. Specifically, it involved 22 in-depth interviews with leading experts and opinion leaders in arts and youth development, and in-person case studies of eight youth development organizations (seven of them community-based arts groups). Across art forms, geographies, size and lifespan of case study organizations, as well as academic and professional backgrounds of our research participants, a common set of organizing principles emerged regarding how to engage and sustain young people's interest in programs of excellence. The principles, which are presented with detailed applications and examples in the body of the paper, are:

**No. 1:** Instructors are professional, practicing artists, and are valued with compensation for their expertise and investment in their professional development.

**No. 2:** Executive directors have a public commitment to high-quality arts programs that is supported by sustained action.

**No. 3:** Arts programs take place in dedicated, inspiring, welcoming spaces and affirm the value of art and artists.



**No. 4:** There is a culture of high expectations, respect for creative expression and an affirmation of youth participants as artists.

**No. 5:** Programs culminate in high-quality public events with real audiences.

**No. 6:** Positive relationships with adult mentors and peers foster a sense of belonging and acceptance.

**No. 7:** Youth participants actively shape programs and assume meaningful leadership roles.

**No. 8:** Programs focus on hands-on skill building using current equipment and technology.

**No. 9:** Programs strategically engage key stakeholders to create a network of support for both youth participants and the programs.

**No. 10:** Programs provide a physically and emotionally safe place for youth.

For many practitioners, the list of principles taken in its entirety may well be daunting. Most of the case study organizations are well established and have had years to get to where they are today. Our hope is that the list gives organizations a useful foundation for developing and implementing effective programs.

### The Nexus of the Research Findings

What the youth we spoke with say they want – instructor artist credentials, inspiring physical spaces, social and emotional support elements, hands-on exposure to technology (where applicable), culminating events – almost perfectly lines up with the key success principles garnered from the case studies, key opinion leader interviews and literature review. And while it may seem obvious that what young people want is also what they need, it was not a foregone conclusion when we began the project. Certainly there are sectors where what experts think young people need does not always align so neatly with what the young people say they want: providing nutrition and snack food, for example. One important implication of this finding is that the principles used in arts programs primarily with highly engaged youth are directly applicable to and desired by their moderately engaged counterparts and may very well move these young people to the next level. Improving the quality of programs overall, with a specific focus on the components young people indicate are motivators and retention drivers, will likely boost engagement and sustain greater youth participation.

The full *Something to Say: Success Principles for After-school Arts Programs from Urban Youth and Other Experts* research report provides detailed examples of the principles for high-quality, effective OST arts programs; specific suggestions for overcoming barriers to participation; and quotes from the primary research with youth and their parents, as well as from the key opinion leader interviews. The project also includes an overview video and video profiles of six of the best practice youth development arts organizations we studied, as well as excerpts of five research interviews. These resources are available in the Knowledge Center on The Wallace Foundation's website at [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org).

# INTRODUCTION, OVERVIEW AND METHODOLOGY



*A young filmmaker at the Spy Hop digital media arts program uses the tools of the trade. Photo courtesy of Spy Hop.*

**L**aSandra<sup>2</sup>, a 13-year-old girl from Birmingham, Ala., likes to make movies. But she got bored when she wasn't challenged enough in an afterschool media arts program, so she stopped going. Now she occasionally creates videos on her own and posts them to YouTube.

*Although Ruben, a 10-year-old boy from Cleveland, Ohio, enjoys dancing and singing, only his family knows he likes these things; he does them privately. Ruben's friends know him mostly as a good student and a basketball player, and unless he decides to tell them, they may never find out about his other interests.*

*Alex, a Newark, N.J., 12-year-old, who is an avid painter and cartoonist, describes the perfect afterschool arts program as one with friendly and artistic teachers, a big, colorful and inspiring space, and cool projects. But when asked whether he would sign up and attend such a program, he hesitates and replies, "Probably not."*

These stories, drawn from nine months of field market research, underscore the complex attitudes of urban, low-income youth toward afterschool arts programs. Such responses may not come as a complete surprise, however, to arts and youth development professionals well acquainted with the headwinds that interfere with low-income, urban youth participation in these activities.

There are many challenges facing urban, low-income youth;

<sup>2</sup> Names and cities of children in interviews were changed to protect their confidentiality.

relatively low levels of participation and engagement in high-quality arts programs might not top the list. And yet, it may be for this exact reason – the seeming superfluousness of arts when there are more visible and urgent needs – that arts are insufficiently funded, and frequently not seen to be essential to the future success of these young people. Arts are often seen as a nice-to-have, an activity associated with leisure and luxury, and this bias leaves arts programs highly susceptible to budget cuts (Rabkin and Hedberg, 2011). In fact, for more than 30 years, public schools across the country have been cutting arts programs to the bone or eliminating them altogether, and meager resources make it difficult to provide meaningful, engaging arts experiences (Bodilly, Augustine and Zakaras, 2008). The availability of alternatives outside the school, such as private lessons or arts camps, is typically limited to those families with the resources and motivation to get access to them (Bodilly and Beckett, 2005).

As a result, many urban, low-income youth grow up without even a cursory understanding of what high-quality arts programs are like, or what benefits may accrue from participation. Even when there is awareness of or interest in out-of-school time (OST) arts programs, many young people face a multitude of personal, social and functional barriers to participation in them, from a surfeit of competing entertainment choices to a lack of transportation. Additionally, urban, low-income parents often believe that arts provide neither life skills nor long-term job opportunities. And so, without strong parental encouragement and endorsement – along the lines of what sports participation enjoys in our culture – arts are relegated to the nice-if-you-have-the-time-or-natural-talent category; they are rarely viewed as a reliable or respected ticket out of poverty.

Overcoming the barriers to creating both supply of and demand for high-quality arts programs in urban, low-income communities is a daunting challenge – but doing so creates opportunities for this underserved population to enjoy the many benefits of arts (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras and Brooks, 2004). However, pinpointing the most potentially effective way to tackle the barriers isn't a clear-cut task. Community-based organizations might try to fill the gap by providing services that are being cut. But most of these groups are anchored to a single community and, as independent organizations working in some degree of isolation from one another, have neither the resources nor the charter

to deliver their programs to all the places where they are needed. On the other hand, addressing the problem through school districts' reach might solve the challenge of scale. But with many districts operating under tax caps, reduced budgets and pressure to raise standardized test scores, the incentives are simply not in place to view widespread school-based arts education as a realistic possibility.

This set of challenges led The Wallace Foundation to ask:

- How can urban, low-income tweens<sup>3</sup> and teens gain equal access to high-quality arts experiences?
- Is there a model of practices that could provide a blueprint for community-based organizations to emulate, so that proven approaches could be deployed in more places, more often?
- Is there a way to approach the analysis of these problems that respects and honors young people as consumers who make informed choices, and how does what youth *want* align with what other experts say they *need*?

*Something to Say: Success Principles for Afterschool Arts Programs from Urban Youth and Other Experts* endeavors to answer these questions and several more. Using a variety of research approaches, we visited programs that worked, spoke to young people in their neighborhoods and homes, interviewed researchers and practitioners, and combed the research to try to answer and address some of the key knowledge gaps in the field of OST arts activities for urban, low-income tweens and teens.

The prevailing approach to addressing problems of scarcity and lack of participation has been to view them as an issue of limited supply. Those with resources ask: "What can we supply the market with – e.g., programs, teachers, underwriting – that changes the status quo?" But this question assumes the problem in the market is only one of unmet demand, that "if we build it, they will come."

A supply-oriented, top-down approach is only part of the solution. A more comprehensive method lies in pairing supply solutions with a stronger demand orientation. Today's savvy marketer does not take supply as a given and simply ask how to sell what can be or is being made. Instead they ask, "How can we make what can be sold?" In other words, rather than trying to convince the market of an offering's worth, they change the offering, using consumer insights.

<sup>3</sup> Tweens were defined in the research as fifth- through eighth-graders, generally corresponding to pre-adolescence and chronological age of 10-13.

Effective marketers seek to understand what their potential customers want and how they make their decisions, and then do what is necessary to meet those desires. As applied to arts programs, we might look beyond the dearth of programs to ask whether what the market needs might not be simply more, but rather something else.

Urban, low-income youth are consumers who make decisions about how to spend their free time. In order for youth to choose to participate in existing or future OST programs (the "product") they must feel compelled to do so against a range of alternative choices. Interest in gaining firsthand an understanding of youths' specific needs and perspectives was a critical driver in this initiative's goal – to provide a foundation of knowledge from which not-for-profit organizations that serve urban, low-income communities may develop or refine effective, engaging and accessible arts programs.

There is always an element of risk in applying models from corporate and consumer marketing to the not-for-profit sector. Some nonprofit leaders may recoil at the suggestion that what works for Disney, Starbucks or Nike might have some implication for the mission-based, not-for-profit sector. But our task here is not to suggest that what is needed in the arts is Madison Avenue magic. What we offer is an opportunity to reframe the problem, and hence the potential solutions, by using a consumer marketing lens. And the first thing good consumer marketers do is to understand who the primary consumer, often called the target consumer, is. Second, they see this target consumer not as the marketer wishes them to behave, but how they *actually* behave within the context of their needs, desires, attitudes and options. And in recent years, nothing has shaped this consumer ecosystem more than the advent of technology and choice, which has permanently shifted power from producers to consumers.

Consumers always have had clout, but it used to be binary: to buy or not to buy what the producer offered. And if they didn't choose what was offered, well, there might not be a better alternative to meet their needs. Try telling Millennials (the name given by demographers to people born between 1980 and 2000) – who can create their own custom-designed sneakers, postage stamps and digital music mixes – that once upon a time cars only came in one color with no options or that to buy a song you often had to buy 10 others on an album, and wide eyed, they shake their heads in disbelief.

Today's consumers have access to many tools for searching and customizing, and this gives them considerably more power and choice than before. Now, consumers can tap virtually unlimited digital marketplaces, including the enor-

mous selection of electronic platforms such as Amazon and eBay. They “like” products and brands and create wish lists to tell marketers and their friends what they want to buy. And they even have the ability to custom-craft products to their own specifications and preferences, from Nike custom shoes and Skin-it brand “skins” (thin adhesive coverings for electronics) to sodas made with Coca-Cola’s new Freestyle fountain machines, which offer about 150 flavors from a single dispenser. Companies offer us the tools and platforms for mass customization, for example providing almost endless varieties and flavor combinations of popular foods.

The use of social networks has also given consumers more power, making it easier to find relevant products and to share their opinions with others. A friend’s sincere recommendation is much more credible than a paid advertisement, and the spread of social media has created many new channels for consumers to build their influence. Marketers have to invest in community management and social listening, which is the monitoring of social media sites, because negative online consumer feedback can quickly snowball if not proactively managed. Due to the speed with which information travels through a network, social media have increased the pace of change; trends start – and fizzle – much faster than before.

How does this wave of more-sophisticated consumerism relate to developing high-quality arts engagement programs for urban, low-income youth? Like any other consumer, urban, low-income youth have been conditioned to expect choice, demand satisfaction and get what they want quickly, or they will seek it elsewhere. They may not spend as much money, or spend their money on the same things as youth from higher income households, but they operate as consumers, making informed choices about where or with whom to spend their time and how to invest their attention and energy. So when considering the problem of arts engagement, we have to understand this demand side of the equation. What do these consumers say they want from OST arts programs? What are their underlying needs and desires: a good time, an escape, skill mastery? What kinds of arts, taught by whom, in what kinds of places are compelling? How do youth make decisions to get involved? What are the roles of peer support and pressure, technology and social and traditional media? What gets in the way of their engagement? To ignore these questions means investing resources in potentially irrelevant programs that fail to tap the real needs and desires of young people.

## Project Goals

Our goals for the research were threefold. First was to apply a balanced research approach, exploring consumer and other



**“Like any other consumer, urban, low-income youth have been conditioned to expect choice, demand satisfaction and get what they want quickly, or they will seek it elsewhere.”**



expert perspectives that lead to insights and models for effectively engaging low-income, urban youth in high-quality arts programs. Second was to disseminate insights so that the field – from single-unit, community-based organizations to national youth development movements – might begin to experiment and explore new approaches for OST arts programs based on the research. Third was to make the insights actionable with practical tactics and implementation guidance, enabling not-for-profit practitioners and leadership to craft their own roadmaps for excellence and collectively address the larger issue of increasing equity,<sup>4</sup> access to, and quality of programs.

Our research gathered insights on market demand directly from consumers – young people who were moderately or highly engaged in at least one form of art. This approach of treating young people as consumers of services rather than recipients of programming, while intuitive for consumer marketers, was a bit unorthodox within the OST arts field; we found virtually no comprehensive, national studies on needs, desires and decision processes based on broad surveys of low-income youth. In part, this may be a resource issue; few organizations have funds to perform national qualitative research, and those that do are likely to be for-profit operations that would not be inclined to share their findings. OST and arts programs experts were enthused and encouraged by our approach of viewing youth as consumers, and the balancing of the opinions of academic and field experts with those of today’s youth.

<sup>4</sup> Equity, as used here, refers to youth of different socioeconomic levels having the same quality of instruction.



*Students collaborate on a mural in SAY Si's visual arts program. Photo courtesy of SAY Si.*

Our research focused on urban, low-income tweens and teens and their decisions about engaging in OST arts activities. Certainly, our work built on the knowledge foundation in youth development and the arts, drawing on the wealth of studies and publications that have contributed to the understanding of quality OST, including the landmark *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*, *Urban Sanctuaries: Neighborhood Organizations in the Lives and Futures of Inner City Youth*, and *Qualities of Quality: Understanding Excellence in Arts Education*. But the findings presented in this paper balance successful models in the field – using case studies of organizations recognized for outstanding arts programs and interviews with respected experts in areas such as afterschool programming for young people – with insights into demand from youth themselves.

The research views low-income, urban youth not as program beneficiaries, but as consumers whose engagement can only be obtained if the value proposition is compelling. Is thinking about low-income, urban youth in this way original or appropriate? Frankly, we weren't sure when we began the project. But as we moved through the key opinion leader interviews, many practitioners and researchers commented that program solutions are often top down and more input from youth is essential to crafting programs they would participate in willingly. Additionally, demand is highly dynamic, and it is essential to use recent research that takes into account trends in OST and technology usage. Hodari Davis, national program director at Youth Speaks, a spoken word and multimedia youth organization in San Francisco made the clarion call:

*Survey the young people that you serve to find out what they would be interested in investing in. Just because they are not investing their money, they are really investing something that is more valuable than money: They are investing their time and their minds.*

To see young people as consumers, we must, in turn, view OST arts programs as consumer offerings that compete with alternatives ranging from other OST programs, hanging out and sports to family obligations, the Internet and video games. And there are other considerations, as well. Consumer products do not merely float into a consumer's orbit; they are packaged with information and branding that make the consumer more (or less) likely to pursue them. Also, participants do not act alone; involvement is conditional on the permission, encouragement and generosity of parents and caregivers, the approval of peer groups, and the personal drive and motivation of the youth themselves to overcome barriers. Like all consumer products and services, these elements – alternatives, branding, influencers and barriers – form a complex ecosystem whose outcomes are not always predictable, and where loyalty can be fickle.

In developing our approach, we sought a holistic view, encompassing opinions of key opinion leaders (well-known and often well-published researchers and practitioners in arts and OST); case study analysis of what is working in OST arts programs; and consumer insights on likes, dislikes, opportunities and needs, both stated and inferred. Throughout the research report, we will return to this construct of consumerism, including discussion of such elements as what drives consumer demand, how we understand varying needs of this consumer within smaller subsegments, and

what kinds of messages or marketing hooks might compel engagement.

## Methodology

The research methodology<sup>5</sup> consisted of four components: a literature review, key opinion leader interviews, case studies, and consumer research, including focus groups and in-home, ethnographic interviews. The literature review comprised over 100 sources focused on youth development, OST in general and OST arts in particular. From the literature and a series of interviews, we identified more than 75 national academic, research and practitioner thought leaders, 22 of whom we interviewed and who are referred to as Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) in this report.

<sup>5</sup> KOL interview participants, discussion guides and case study organizational profiles are included in the appendices.

We also identified 48 exemplary OST programs, nearly all of them arts oriented, and winnowed that list down to eight organizations on which to conduct case studies. The process was not easy; there are many organizations that are considered best practice OST arts programs, and many have been doing this work for more than 10 years. We applied selection criteria, detailed in Appendix E, to focus on those organizations whose practices would add to the body of existing foundational knowledge. The case study methodology included program observation during site visits; executive and program staff interviews; in some cases, youth participant interviews; and a review of each organization's materials such as program plans, strategic plans, evaluation and assessment rubrics, program participation contracts, marketing materials, research reports and websites.

The eight case study organizations were:

### **826 National / 826NYC** – Brooklyn, N.Y. / **826 Valencia** – San Francisco, Calif.

826 centers offer a variety of inventive programs that provide under-resourced students with opportunities to explore their creativity and improve their writing skills. [www.826national.org](http://www.826national.org)

### **RiverzEdge Arts Project** – Woonsocket, R.I.

RiverzEdge provides teens in this economically disadvantaged community with hands-on work experience in graphic design, digital media and visual arts. [www.riverzedgearts.org](http://www.riverzedgearts.org)

### **Fleisher Youth Art Programs** – Philadelphia, Pa.

Fleisher Art Memorial provides studio art classes, exhibitions, and community-based programming to youth and adults throughout Philadelphia. [www.fleisher.org](http://www.fleisher.org)

### **SAY Sí** – San Antonio, Tex.

Serving San Antonio's youth, SAY Sí is a multidisciplinary arts program with a history of long-term participation by middle school and high school students. [www.saysi.org](http://www.saysi.org)

### **National Dance Institute of New Mexico**

– Albuquerque and Santa Fe, N. M.  
National Dance Institute of New Mexico's performing arts programs help youth develop core skills and habits of mind that carry over into all aspects of their lives. [www.ndi-nm.org](http://www.ndi-nm.org)

### **Spy Hop** – Salt Lake City, Utah

Spy Hop Productions is a youth media arts center that provides innovative afterschool and community programs. [www.spyhop.org](http://www.spyhop.org)

### **Playworks** – San Francisco, Calif.

Playworks restores valuable teaching time, reduces bullying, increases physical activity and improves the school and learning environment by providing play and physical activity at recess and throughout the school day. Although not an arts program, Playworks was an instructive model in the approach to staff development and expansion to multiple sites and cities. [www.playworks.org](http://www.playworks.org)

### **Youth Speaks** – San Francisco, Calif.

Youth Speaks is a spoken word and presenting organization in the San Francisco Bay Area. Youth Speaks has built the Brave New Voices network of more than 70 integrated organizations throughout the United States. [www.youthspeaks.org](http://www.youthspeaks.org)

An important consideration in research design was to separate the KOL and case study research from the consumer research. This approach allowed us to rely on field experts to tell us what they felt young people needed and what, in their experience, worked. But it also allowed us to independently assess what young people and their parents and caregivers said they wanted and how they navigated the decision process. If we had started with one half of our research and merely validated what we heard with the other half, we would have risked missing important messages and insights. We ran these work streams in parallel and compared findings. It was the strong alignment and congruence of insights from these two separate approaches that gave us great confidence in the credibility of the 10 principles for effective, high-quality OST arts programs that we drew from the KOL interviews and case study research.

We conducted more than two dozen focus groups, which typically consisted of six to 10 youth being interviewed in a structured discussion led by a facilitator. Separately, we conducted parent and caregiver focus groups. We also interviewed 11 young people in their homes, first solo, then with their parents and finally in a triad, with two friends. This type of interview, known as an ethnographic interview, provides detail and insights into family and friendship dy-

namics, potential clues from the in-home setting to factors that affect OST activities. Prior to participation in either focus groups or ethnographic interviews, youth participants in the study maintained written and digital diaries of how they spent their free time; these were also reviewed and analyzed. In all, the primary research included more than 200 tweens and teens, plus eight groups of parents and caregivers, recruited from low-income neighborhoods in seven cities across the United States. Participation in the study was generally focused on tweens, or parents of tweens, whose engagement and interest in the arts could be described as moderate. All participants were compensated for their time per industry standards.

### **A Word About Our Findings**

We found that programs that practice excellence often are filled to capacity, and there is a lot of innovation in the field, a strong orientation toward flexibility in adapting programs to young people's interests and a sincere hunger for this type of research to guide program design and evolution. More importantly, many expert ideas aligned with participant needs. Now, this may seem obvious at first, that the best-run programs are meeting youth where they are, and that what they say and believe young people need almost perfectly



*Jason Yoon, director of education at the Queens Museum of Art in New York City and longtime practitioner in afterschool arts programs, was one of the key opinion leaders interviewed for this report. Video still by Wil Weldon.*





*Young people including these teens at a focus group in Providence, R.I., were one of the sources of information for this report. Video still by Wil Weldon.*

overlaps with what youth across the country told us they want. But this wasn't a certainty in our hypothesis. It would have been perfectly reasonable if what young people needed did not align with what they wanted. This is often the case with food and nutrition, that what young people's bodies need is not what they crave and choose to eat. So the significance of this overlap, the idea that what the youth need is also what they want, is meaningful and important, and leads not only to a framework for a potentially effective roadmap of best practices, but also to a deeper exploration of why it is so challenging to bring this model to market at a scale that would make a difference.

Exciting as this alignment is, the research findings are also sobering because the personal, social and pragmatic obsta-

cles to OST arts program involvement facing moderately engaged tweens and teens are not easily overcome or mitigated. There was no silver bullet to make these programs more easily accessible, socially acceptable or perceived as cultural norms. And even the best programs (if they had capacity) may fail to engage significant portions of the population; for various reasons, not all tweens who want art in their lives are likely to participate in structured programs.

The research uncovered a set of obstacles facing programs trying to serve young people on the cusp of engagement, as well as opportunities for reaching such youth. While there is no guarantee that addressing these issues will increase engagement dramatically, the elimination, mitigation or management of these obstacles is a logical place to start.

CHAPTER

**'DEMAND-SIDE' INSIGHTS**

1

# Introduction

Most market research targets consumers who have a problem and are in need of a solution. Drivers who value being environmentally conscientious are selected to survey interest in electric cars, for example; chronic reflux sufferers are recruited to offer opinions about antacids. For that reason, among the most perplexing challenges facing market researchers is the one we tackled: a group of consumers – in this case, urban, low-income youth with a moderate engagement in arts – defined more by what they are not doing than what they are. Policymakers, foundations and youth development professionals may see this as troublesome, but the youth about whom they are concerned may not view themselves as having a problem at all. From the point of view of urban, low-income youth, their level of arts engagement may seem entirely appropriate and not at all what marketers call a “consumer pain point,” or a problem that consumers feel needs to be solved. Talking with urban, low-income youth in a focus group about why they don’t engage in more OST arts programs might be like asking why they don’t bowl or fly kites more; activities they are not doing may not be easily available, or they might not be pastimes they or their friends think a lot about.

Here is how we approached this challenge: Start with the heavy, or passionate, user. If we were selling a new line of hand tools, we would begin with carpenters and woodworkers, because they would have a lot to share about the factors that drive their enthusiasm and insights into what might inspire them to try the products. The premise is that passionate consumers are able to illuminate issues concerning their decision process and discuss influencers, price sensitivity, alternative solutions and desired product features. The discussions provide useful insights into topics to explore with the more casual user.

Who is *our* “heavy user”? He or she is the passionate, highly arts-engaged teen, participating, on a consistent basis, in structured OST arts programs. We recruited 64 such teens (ages 14 to 18) from the Boys & Girls Clubs and YMCA branches in Boston Mass. and Providence, R.I. These consumers came through their tween years with some exposure

to arts and made a decision to invest their time in their teen years in arts. They told us about the barriers they faced and how they overcame them, what they enjoyed and what might influence more of their peers to participate.

We then recruited 151 moderately arts-engaged tweens and 73 parents in five urban, economically distressed regions across the United States.<sup>6</sup> Using the teen insights, we designed qualitative research to include focus groups, in-home ethnographic interviews and friendship triads – groups composed of the research subject and two friends – and a study of youth research participants’ photo journals<sup>7</sup> created as part of the study. This multifaceted approach, along with direct and inferential research techniques, creates a highly informed view of the adolescents’ preferences and influences, including attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions.

We focused on tweens because many youth development organizations spoke of severe attrition at the 14- to 15-year-old level (Deschenes, Arbretton et al, 2010). We decided to survey fifth- to eighth-graders, ages at which they assume more responsibility for choosing OST activities and before many organizations see significant reductions in participation. We included key influencers, such as caregivers and close friends, the latter through friendship triad interviews. To find our subjects, our researchers hung signs in target neighborhoods in gathering places such as community centers, churches and grocery stores. The signs encouraged interested parties to call a telephone number. During that conversation, tweens were screened for their qualification to participate in the research based on income, race and gender (some teen groups and all tween groups were single gender, and most were racially homogeneous) and ability to express themselves clearly in a group setting. We also screened for interest and engagement in arts, ensuring that participants were not outright rejecters. While a few were highly engaged, most were moderately engaged, which was the consumer whose insights we sought.

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6 A more detailed account of the research methodology appears in the Appendix B.

7 The photo journals chronicled how participants spent their free time in words and pictures from a researcher-supplied digital camera.



*The RiverzEdge Arts Project in Woonsocket, R. I., works with young people ages 14 to 24. Photo courtesy of RiverzEdge.*

If one thinks of arts engagement as existing along a spectrum, at one end would be the “rejecters.” These consumers may enjoy music, movies, museums, dancing or any number of arts as an observer or participant. But they are overtly resistant to structured OST arts and are confident these programs are not for them. A few may come around, just as a few vegetarians become carnivores, but the odds of receptivity are about as low as one can get.

At the other end of the spectrum are the “embracers.” For them, the arts are a passion to which they are committed. We heard about tweens who would take public transportation two-and-a-half hours each way to participate in an afterschool writing program, and other youth who spend upwards of 25 hours a week on documentary filmmaking projects. These young people may face many obstacles to their continued arts involvement, such as family and school obligations. But because of a strong desire to engage in creative expression, they will have meaningful, high-quality arts experiences in structured programs and informal settings during the course of their adolescence.

The young people between these bookend cohorts of rejecters and embracers are the main focus of this project. They are moderately engaged and were screened for ongoing participation and enjoyment in at least one form of arts using a very broad and inclusive view of the category. They enjoy the arts, are open to exploring existing interests or building new ones and have likely dabbled in arts already in some structured or casual setting. For some, barriers to further engagement are minor; for others, they are major. But for most, while their desire to be creative shapes their choice of out-of-school activities, they are not sure yet what role they want the arts to play in their lives.



*The National Dance Institute of New Mexico offers in-school, afterschool, summer and advanced training to young people. Photo courtesy of NDI-NM.*

The key insights emerging from hundreds of hours of discussions, interviews and analysis suggest, as expected, a challenging situation. But they also define a potential pathway to higher engagement in the arts. We don't know yet how many tweens will want to walk down that path, but it offers a viable alternative to existing options. The three key insights are:

1. *Multiple barriers limit demand for structured arts programming.* Limited exposure to high-quality OST arts programs compounded by emotional, social and practical barriers negatively influence young people's decisions about whether to participate in an arts program.
2. *Tweens exert a high degree of control in choosing their out-of-school time activities and are prone to rapid disengagement.* Decision-making in tween years shifts from parents to their children. Tweens can choose, or can drop out of, an OST activity for a number of reasons, from boredom to the preference of a competing interest, with few consequences.
3. *Youth expressed strong preference for structured arts programs with five key features.* They are: professional and expert instructors, experiential learning in inspiring spaces, the prospect of new friends focused on similar interests, and culminating and competitive events. A fifth area comprises program extras and proven incentives such as snacks.

Together, these insights offer guidance to youth-serving programs, derived directly from consumers, as well as rich opportunity. They also suggest a number of demanding requirements for organizations wishing to engage adolescents in arts programming. Not only must these activities capture the tweens' interest, they also must stoke latent demand amidst multiple and formidable barriers, not the least of which are inertia and a multitude of competing interests.



Teenagers in our “heavy user” focus groups provided insights into how they grew interested in the arts and sustained that interest through their tween years. Video still by Wil Weldon.



## MULTIPLE BARRIERS LIMIT DEMAND FOR STRUCTURED ARTS PROGRAMMING.

We come to this insight not through one data point, but through a collection of findings drawn from a range of questions and discussions. These barriers take many forms, and we grouped them into three categories: what youth say or the points that can be inferred about their needs and desires; what young people perceive as the norms within their peer set, and what parents believe to be the benefits of arts participation; and resource issues affecting access, such as cost or proximity. Collectively, the following factors serve to limit demand for structured arts programming:

### Needs and Desires Barriers

#### ‘The Arts’ Terminology

Programming terminology – specifically, how programs are named or classified – is one of the first filters consumers use to establish or diminish appeal. The young people in our study connected the term “the arts” primarily with visual art, specifically painting and drawing, and with museums.

The tweens in our study did not easily associate the terminology *arts* or *arts programs* with activities such as dancing, singing, design, digital media, or beat-making, which were among pursuits that they indicated hold significantly more appeal for them. Tweens were receptive to expanding their view of how “arts” is defined to include some of these other forms of expression but needed to be prompted by focus group moderators to do so.

Besides an association with visual arts, there often is a close association between *arts* and *arts and crafts*, a term that carries its own negative baggage. Tweens see arts and crafts as being for “younger kids,” a stage from which tweens have decidedly graduated. This is not to say tweens dislike arts and crafts activities necessarily, only that they define the category narrowly and their stage of development compels them to create distance from activities associated with younger children. The term *arts and crafts* also triggers far fewer positive connotations than a reference to a specific art form does.

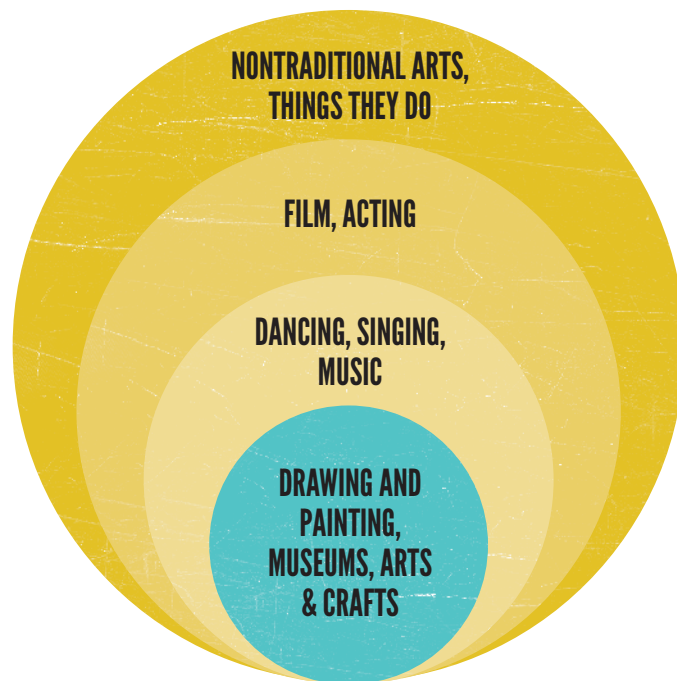


*Poets from Youth Speaks in San Francisco participate in a poetry workshop. Photo courtesy of Youth Speaks.*



*Hodari Davis, national program director for Youth Speaks, connects with lead artist Dennis Kim during Brave New Voices. Photo by Daniel Schaefer. Courtesy of Youth Speaks.*

# TWEEN'S INTERPRETATIONS of 'THE ARTS'



*This diagram represents tweens' strength of association to the terms "arts" and "arts programs." Their strongest and unaided associations are with visual art forms and arts and crafts; other associations in outer circles usually surfaced only with prompting; greater distance from the small circle represents weaker association with the term "arts," illustrating the challenges of using arts as a broad, all-encompassing and inclusive term.*

Program directors and those who craft marketing communications need to be aware that their definition of arts is often different from the youth definition. So one immediate and significant implication is that when organizations broadly describe their offerings as "arts programs," they need to understand they may be unintentionally communicating an offering of specific, often traditional, forms of visual arts, which may hold less appeal for many young people. Commonly used arts terminology may lead a young person to bypass programs that might otherwise be of great interest, simply because of the nomenclature. Fortunately, this is often easily fixed; art-form-specific names are helpful, such as *Mastering Digital Photography with Photoshop*, as are names that suggest engagement, learning, or adventure, such as *Zombies Take Chicago: The Movie*.

## Competing Interests

As young people move into adolescence, parental supervision decreases and tweens are more able to choose their free time activities. It is also a period of rapid cognitive and physical development, when interests that were childhood curiosities can be pursued in a more dedicated and focused way. This

stage opens up a host of alternative activity choices, each of which competes for the tween's time. In line with our approach of viewing these young people as consumers, we need to view these potential competing pastimes through the lens of their appeal to the tween. Some OST interests and activities that were frequently mentioned included sports (both leagues and neighborhood pick-up games); youth programs through community centers or houses of worship; hanging out with friends, which often is blended with media engagement such as watching TV, texting, Facebook and watching videos on computers; spending time with family; rest; and creative outlets (what we would call the arts, although tweens often named the specific art form).

Above all, tweens told us they want to have fun and emphatically stated they do not like to be bored. They have and expect to have a lot of choices. They are open to new things, and especially seek out novel experiences and opportunities to make new friends. Many seemed quite intent on using some of their growing freedom to engage in fun activities in accessible, free and unstructured environments, ranging from hanging out and "doing nothing" or playing video games, to shopping and pursuing members of the opposite sex.



*A tween focus group participant charts some of her out-of-school time activities. Video still by Jen Samuel.*

When it comes to structured programming, perhaps more than any other competing interest, organized sports and other athletic pursuits are seen as a ready framework or baseline for comparison. Tweens and parents alike value the egalitarian nature of sports in their communities, and they see programs as well organized and highly inclusive, with different levels of competition so that even novices can participate. Parents view athletic pursuits, especially organized leagues, very positively, providing their children with developmental and physical benefits as well as something to keep them focused. In many cases, parents also tout the potential economic benefits – scholarships or professional opportunities – often with little recognition of the actual odds of their child “hitting the jackpot” with an athletic collegiate scholarship or professional sports contract.

Digital media competes with structured arts programs in another way – as a surrogate for instruction. There was a time when getting lessons required leaving one’s home, but that era has passed; tweens report that the Internet, and YouTube in particular, provide them with effective means for learning new or improving existing skills in areas of interest, such as playing an instrument, dance or design. Many youth cited the appeal of peer experts over adults when using YouTube. For some tweens, as we discuss later, this is an appealing alternative to structured programs, with much lower levels of commitment, investment and logistical barriers, and with more convenience.

### **Informal OST Creative Expression**

Tweens revealed in the focus groups that they often enjoyed arts activities outside of a structured format. Even though tweens were receptive to potential benefits such as skill building and socializing, many young people were lukewarm to the idea of a structured program. For some, arts engagement is compartmentalized and viewed as separate from their external, school and peer communities.

In discussing their independent artistic pursuits, some tweens spoke of the enjoyment they derived from writing poetry or lyrics, or from drawing or design, and said it was something they did to relax or escape. As one sixth-grade girl from Philadelphia told us, “Sometimes it helps people just breathe for a day and relax, and I think they also do [arts] so they can just get away from what’s happening. ... When you draw you feel like you’re in another world instead of the world you are in now.”

These tweens did not view their creative activities as more than a private endeavor, however, and few people in their lives knew in any detail about their involvement. In some cases, the tweens banded together to form dance groups or make movies or beats with friends, but the effort remained unstructured. As one tween girl from Newark said, “If adults ran it, they’d probably make us practice every day and yell at us. They’d probably want you to spend money and stuff. We



run it the way we want. ... We have our dance practice at a rec center because that's where we all meet up anyhow."

Comments from highly arts-engaged teenagers underscored this attitude toward structured formats. None said they first came to a structured singing or dancing program because they wanted to participate in that art form. In almost all instances, they were on site for other reasons – playing sports or seeing a tutor, for example – and their ability or desire to perform was accidentally discovered by a peer or an adult mentor and slowly drawn out. One teen boy in a Boys & Girls Club in Boston admitted, "Singing is my own little hidden talent, but not anymore. There's a recording studio here." Still, this young man continued to be very private about his participation and would only sing in the presence of two specific friends at the Boys & Girls Club.

### **Emotional Restraint, Social Stigma and Low Levels of Commitment**

As young people enter adolescence, they embark upon a period of identity formation, and they become increasingly self-conscious. Changes in the brain anatomy linked with sense of self, specifically the dorsal medial prefrontal cortex, have been tied to this stage of growth. Cognitive neuroscientist Sarah-Jayne Blakemore, of University College London, suggests that adolescence is a period of greater independence and waning parental influence, so teens begin to rely more strongly on what peers think, "and develop a more socially constructed sense of self" (Choi, 2009).

Given the heightened self-consciousness at this stage of adolescence, tweens can feel particularly vulnerable when participating in public or structured art programs where their art is on display and available for critique. So it is not surprising many tweens shy away from an activity that is subject to review by others in their age group since, at this exact moment, their brains are developmentally hypersensitive to peer criticism. And young people are aware that their peers can be harsh in their commentary, which can be daunting. This is why, as will be discussed later, strong arts programs put a lot of emphasis on guiding young people in how to offer and receive peer criticism, and how to prepare for a culminating event.

In our research, the tweens who professed a strong interest in structured OST arts programming often had participated in such programs before, had a lot of confidence in their abilities and were recognized by peers with positive feedback about their drawing, dancing, rapping or other artistic skills. Importantly, the programs often played a role in building that confidence; it was not a pre-existing state that resulted



**“Particularly for older boys, the possibility of looking foolish, untalented or inexperienced in front of their peers or younger kids was intolerable.”**



in self-selection of programs by the already talented and confident. Three characteristics seemed to enable tweens and teens to push past their heightened self-consciousness: budding mastery, an unusually high degree of self-confidence and intrinsic motivation.

Indirect probing around their likelihood to try out an arts program revealed that a high proportion of tweens harbored concerns about whether they would “be good at” the activity. While the young people agreed that everyone could be creative, they also felt natural talent contributed a great deal to success in any art form. Tweens expressed anxiety about being a novice or judged on their ability at the outset of an activity. Though the source of judgment was not explicitly stated, the tweens talked a lot about previous unfavorable experiences with OST program staff and negative peer judgment, real or perceived, which was of special concern. Particularly for older boys, the possibility of looking foolish, untalented or inexperienced in front of their peers or younger kids was intolerable. In fact, while tweens often said they dropped out of a program because the teacher was too mean, further probing revealed that sometimes this was a smokescreen for casual participants who did not want to be pushed beyond their comfort zone.

In some cases, the need for peer acceptance boosted involvement. The desire to engage in programs that allowed for time with friends, or were popular choices in line with social norms, was a consistent theme and often the cited reason a young person chose to stick with some activities over other less-popular choices.

Most of the young people in our study described a casual

commitment to a formal pursuit of the arts – even if they had long histories of OST arts participation or indicated that taking part in creative pursuits was their favorite activity. In fact, arts engagement was highly situational, and quite often more loosely tethered than it appeared. A young person can take classes, progress nicely for years and then drop out, seemingly on a whim. Their involvement may have run its course or interests may have shifted based on taste, peer group attitudes or other factors. It is not a given, then, that because tweens appear to be committed they feel an activity has any real meaning to them, or that they will experience high levels of commitment or sustained interest. Often tweens said they were taking a class but were not “into it” and were going to drop out at some point.

### **High Personal Permission Barriers**

Even before practical barriers such as cost and transportation are considered, participation in any activity is often predicated on two foundational factors: a positive view of the activity, and whether the subject sees himself or herself as a likely successful participant. (Success can take on several forms: fun, mastery, etc.) When these factors are in place, it is much easier for a young person to give himself or herself permission to participate, because of an ability to envision involvement as positive and rewarding. It is as if activities are sorted into two piles in the young person’s mind: things that are for me (for which I give myself permission to participate) and things that are not for me. Permission barriers are created when young people reject their own participation, even when there is some latent desire, because they cannot envision a good experience or a good fit.

This presents a challenge for OST participation. Unfortunately, many of the urban, low-income tweens we spoke with have had few experiences with high-quality arts programs. Their reference points – programs they recall as being tedious or as not allowing them autonomy of personal expression – offered little positive input. Again, in part because of terminology and in part because they form the basis of many young people’s experience, arts programs are often associated with arts and crafts, which tweens connect with young kids, rote activities, minimal creativity and, at times, uninspiring instructors. A fifth-grader in Cleveland echoed a feeling expressed across regions when she said the programs she was familiar with were “boring.” She said, “You don’t ever get to do anything new. You don’t learn new stuff.”

If arts and crafts are viewed as too remedial, some OST programs are perceived as being at the other end of the spectrum, where tweens said they believed their lack of skills or mastery would expose them to potential failure. A negative

view of the activity based on their beliefs and experience, coupled with fear of public ridicule, contributes to high permission barriers for young people in OST arts activities.

### **Cultural Norms and Attitudes**

#### **Desire to Conform, and Low Social ‘Cost’ of Non-Engagement**

Tweens want to conform to what they perceive as normal for their peer group. This is known as a concern with descriptive norms, and such perceptions are often not supportive of arts participation. Tweens said they believed that most of their peers were not involved in the arts, which made non-participation the perceived norm. Additionally, many young people who are not taking part in arts programming have less opportunity to interact with arts-engaged peers during OST – experiences that could help change their perceptions.

Engagement in the arts can be stigmatizing, especially in the case of older boys. A seventh-grader in Oakland, Calif., said he might not participate in an arts program because of “other people telling you it’s bootsie, wack.” In fact, on many occasions during the field research focus groups, we observed boys, who had privately indicated their favorite activity was photography or dancing, sitting stone-faced, unwilling to reveal their participation, even in front of other boys who were strangers they likely would never see again. Perhaps this is because there is no social status cost to not being involved in arts and little social benefit gained from arts participation, unless one has achieved high proficiency or mastery. For a tween whose brain increasingly is focused on social standing, this combination of arts being outside the norm and having low association with enhanced status creates a significant barrier to engagement.

We heard in our research a few exceptions to boys’ tendency to conceal their interest in arts in front of their peers, and those were in the areas of media arts, the design of sports-related apparel and music. The ability to design sneakers or clothing graphics or lay down beats was both socially accepted and carried social currency in part because these activities are seen more as personal expression than arts.

#### **Parents Do Not Associate Arts with Higher-Order Goals**

Although tweens are entering a period in which they become more independent, parental influence is still important. Parents often view their children’s extracurricular activities through the lens of potential career opportunities or other competencies. When asked about what they hope for

their children, parents gave optimistic and ambitious answers: college, a good job, a family, sometimes fame. They also want their children to develop self-esteem as well as social and life skills such as teamwork and confidence. Generally, however, for parents we interviewed, there are very weak direct or causal connections between arts and any of these goals. It isn't that they dislike arts or view exposure for their child in a negative light; they just do not view these activities as advancing life skills or career goals, and therefore tend not to prioritize them as worthy of dedicated and focused effort and time, particularly at the expense of other activities that might offer a greater payoff. More often than not, the parents we spoke with see arts programs in the "nice-to-have" category for offering a creative outlet and providing focus, as opposed to being essential or a priority. Consequently, few parents seem concerned about their children's lack of involvement in the arts.

These parents are keenly aware of the financial constraints they live under, and they want to see that their kids are working toward a viable and sustainable source of income. "It's not just about now, but where will it take you. No photographer makes enough money," commented the parent of a sixth-grader in Cleveland. Perhaps the lack of role models for careers in arts sways parents; few in our groups knew people who made a comfortable living as a working artist. In fact, those individuals they knew who worked as artists did so "on the side," in addition to their everyday jobs. In any case, when asked what they would think if their children wanted to be professional artists, they were skeptical. "They better have a backup plan," was a common response. This is not to say the goal of most OST arts programs is employment in the arts. But when parents perceive a causal link between participation in a particular OST activity and their long-term hopes and goals for their children, they are more apt to encourage and support their child's involvement in that program.

Where do parents of moderately arts-engaged kids think these higher-order life and career skills can be acquired? Most often, from engagement in organized sports, which are seen as providing structure, teamwork, exercise, commitment, opportunities for scholarships and the dream of a professional opportunity and economic windfall.

Throughout the focus groups, a noteworthy number of parents shared a fantasy indulgence around sports, with a surprising number confidently asserting their child someday would be a starting quarterback or point guard. "My boy, he wants to be a pro football player. He can do it. He's really good. And when he makes his money he will give back to this community and take care of Mama," said a parent

## PARENT COMMENTS FROM FOCUS GROUPS, ILLUSTRATING CONCERNS ABOUT ARTS AS A CAREER:

"The road [in arts] is hard. But you don't even have to be the best attorney [in order to make a living]."  
— *Parent of Sixth-Grader, Newark*

"I don't think [singing is] going to be the right path. Put food on the table, support yourself. You need something to back you up."  
— *Parent, Newark*

in Cleveland. Of course, this attitude feeds the descriptive norm, especially for boys, that sports are accepted and non-participation in athletics is a liability, whereas a lack of involvement in the arts carries little stigma or consequence.

There were some exceptions, of course. Some parents whose children were involved in arts spoke of the benefits their children accrued. The issue here is one of compounding influences. At the exact time that young people begin to take on more responsibility for their own decision making, and begin to weigh more heavily the opinions of their peers, the parents are often coming across as only mild advocates of the benefits of arts. For young people who believe their friends are not participating, or might judge them harshly if they do, there are rarely countervailing forces in the home advocating for the arts.

## Resource Barriers

### Practical Hurdles

Challenges related to family obligations and neighborhood factors, notably safety and transportation, are often assumed to be key obstacles to engagement for urban, low-income youth. Will helping young people with issues of affordability or transportation lead to higher participation? While these factors arose in our research as well, for the young people and parents we spoke with, they were not the strongest barriers to participation in an OST arts program<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Lack of transportation has been widely cited, in secondary literature, as a significant barrier to OST program participation generally. Our finding that this was not among the strongest barriers may be because our research participants may have skewed toward those families with better access to transportation: To participate in the groups, they had to get to the community centers where they were held. However, this finding was corroborated by the in-home ethnographic studies, which did not require participants to get access to transportation.



*Participants in Spy Hop's SPARK program, for youth ages 7 to 12, have the opportunity to learn the basics of film, visual effects and sound effects. Photo by Erin Hanley. Courtesy of Spy Hop.*

Parents and caregivers said that the top criteria for deciding on OST program participation for their children were whether the programs were free or low cost, nearby, offered at convenient times and in a safe place. But parents also displayed creative resourcefulness, suggesting that if a program really sparked their child's interest and the benefits were convincing, they would find a way to overcome cost, proximity or transportation obstacles. As one parent in Cleveland said, "As long as I see the value in it, and she's excited about it, I'll find a way to make it happen." In a classic case of "if there's a will there's a way," parents and caregivers may have used practical hurdles as a way to test the child's interest, and if the child persisted and indicated strong interest, these hurdles were often deemed surmountable.

### **Is Removing the Barriers Enough to Increase Participation?**

None of the barriers to arts engagement, taken individually, seems to be so compelling that interventions could not address each one. However, the combination of low relevance; social risk; lack of emotional engagement; few role models; few reference points of high-quality, engaging programs; and personal, cultural, and practical barriers create a confluence of obstacles that only highly motivated, higher-initiative tweens are likely to overcome. So it is no wonder that among moderately arts-engaged tweens, the interest level in, and hence the demand for, many structured programs is lackluster.



**“Our study identified greater opportunity to engage young tweens (fifth- and sixth-graders) in OST arts programs, because in addition to being less influenced by peer pressure than their seventh- and eighth-grade counterparts, that group showed much more willingness to participate, and to try – and fail.”**



If demand is truly low – or, said another way, if the supply of programs is adequate for the market demand – is there really a problem to be solved? The answer depends on how we ask the question. The programs that these young people imagine – based in large part on their experience – may not generate enough demand to signal a crisis. But that doesn't mean there is not latent demand for great arts programs. It just means that their known model of an arts program is not sufficiently motivating. If the model were different, so too might be the demand. And while this logic has been applied fast and loose to bring many new product failures to market, it also explains why some arts programs have waiting lists while many others fail to meet enrollment goals.

Another explanation for the demand challenges lies with the young people who express a preference for creative expression outside the formality of a structured program. When Alex, one of the tweens discussed previously, revealed he would not attend even his ideal OST arts program, he expressed a view held by many young people. In fact, about one quarter of the moderately arts-engaged kids interviewed had

the same response. This finding suggests creating a “perfect program” is not enough for some tweens; for these young people, overcoming the myriad barriers is essential, and for others even that is not enough. Even when few barriers stand in the way, some tweens just are not interested in structured OST arts programs.

Our study identified greater opportunity to engage young tweens (fifth- and sixth-graders) in OST arts programs, because in addition to being less influenced by peer pressure than their seventh- and eighth-grade counterparts, that group showed much more willingness to participate, and to try – and fail. Because younger tweens seemed more open-minded and interested in novel experiences, the likelihood is higher they will try a new program or activity that sounds like fun. Such openness suggests some of the social and personal identity barriers are not in full force yet, so there may be more opportunities to shape fifth- and sixth-graders' perceptions of OST arts programs, mitigate barriers and get them meaningfully involved in these activities.



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## TWEENS EXERT A HIGH DEGREE OF CONTROL IN CHOOSING THEIR OUT-OF-SCHOOL-TIME ACTIVITIES AND ARE PRONE TO RAPID DISENGAGEMENT.

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This insight did not – or should not – surprise us, since a key assumption in the design of the research project was that tweens are savvy consumers who make decisions about how they spend their time. But the way they do it – the age at which the behavior begins, their use of technology as an enabler, and the degree of parental accommodation of their decisions – was revealing and important in understanding the drivers of demand and disengagement.

Across most ethnic groups (Asian families were the exception) and household structures, tweens are increasingly assuming the role of savvy negotiator. As Tyrone from Newark said, “I decide mostly. My parents wanted me to step, but I wanted to do soccer. They don't have the power. I give them the power, but I decide in the end.” Tyrone's comment was echoed in myriad ways in focus groups across the country; the tweens we spoke to make many decisions that directly affect them. They are savvy negotiators who advocate for their preferences. A Birmingham parent reinforced tweens' weight in the decision-making process: “I won't force her to do anything. If I do, she won't put 110 percent into it, and then what's the point? If I know her friends are in it, and



**“I decide mostly. My parents wanted me to step, but I wanted to do soccer. They don't have the power. I give them the power, but I decide in the end.”**



she'll stick with it, I'll make the time for it.” Young people and parents alike tell us that, barring prohibitive costs,



*Parents and caregivers of tweens share their views in a focus group. Video still by Wil Weldon.*

parents often approve their children's requests. As a result, tweens are confident in their ability to lobby successfully for the OST programming they want.

Of course, this successful approval for OST participation is based on strategic self-selection; tweens know in advance what programs, costs, and locations would be rejected outright, and they are more apt to choose activities for which they can successfully make a case. "If it's fun, and it's free, and it's at a safe place, then my mom will let me do it," said one tween girl from Cleveland. Some know that if a parent needs to drive them, and works on Saturdays, then requesting enrollment in a program meeting on that day is a non-starter, and they simply will not bring it up. Tweens also tend to select more socially acceptable and peer-popular programs. Further, most choose activities they have some experience with, although this familiarity may be in short supply due to aforementioned resource constraints in urban, low-income communities.

As the chart on page 38 illustrates, the flow of information and the negotiation are initiated by the tween. Programs that wish to engage and enroll tweens need to adjust their marketing messages from appealing directly to the parent, as they might for a pre-tween program, to empowering the tween to initiate a successful dialogue with his or her parents. Well-marketed programs not only offer basic appeal to tweens on key features and approaches but also equip them

to answer key questions that are likely to arise in the parental negotiations.

Especially as tweens get older, parents come to accept that, while they still may try to steer their kids toward certain activities, unless the child is motivated and engaged he or she will quit; they often lack the influence or energy to overcome that resistance. And while many parents still mandate certain types of involvement or participation – family, church or school events, for example – young people told us this pressure does not exist for OST programming. In other words, OST arts activities fall into the optional column – neither expected nor required but negotiable if tweens can persuade their parents to let them participate – and are just as negotiable to drop.

### **Two Reasons for Quitting OST Arts Programs: Boredom and Difficulty**

The tweens in our study generally cited two reasons for quitting OST arts programs: activities either bored them or were too challenging. In their own words, tweens almost always blamed the instructor, claiming they were "mean" or "pushy," but the tweens' stories often suggested they simply needed an excuse to drop out. A young lady in Newark explained, "Don't yell. Don't put me on blast. Explain it to me in a calm fashion. But anyway, I was just getting bored of it. I've been doing it for so long and was seeing new stuff that looks interesting."

Tweens' loss of interest can be organic: They simply lose or outgrow their interest. Or it can be due to implicit peer pressure if, for example, their friends do not participate and they begin to feel lonely. Tweens rarely expressed this feeling outright, but it could be inferred from other comments. A teen in one of the Boston groups articulated it more clearly saying, "I was bored with lessons. I was in that class by myself, with no friends.<sup>9</sup> There were other people but I didn't know them. So I eventually stopped going." A fifth-grade girl from Cleveland sized up an arts program she had joined as being underwhelming: "You don't get to do anything new. You don't learn anything new. You do not get to do what they said it was going to be."

The second reason is difficulty; sometimes the program's level of difficulty rises faster than the tween's interest or ability. Devon, for example, a tween from Oakland, heard the flute being played on television and thought "it sounded beautiful, like birds," and he wanted to try it. But he stopped going, "because the notes got too hard." In contrast, consider the familiar tween and teen pastime of playing video games, the popularity of which has, in part, been attributed to their satisfaction-inducing strategy of giving players opportunities to achieve success and recognition relatively quickly (McGonigal, 2011). Failure to achieve mastery in an art form in a short time frame, due to lack of talent or practice, can be discouraging and may lead tweens to shift to other activities.

Dropping out and switching programs is common and motivated by a number of factors, some related to the program, others related to the participant's tastes, development, social circle or onset of practical barriers. In one discussion with sixth-grade girls, every respondent mentioned that they planned to drop an arts program they were currently taking. As the tweens discussed dropping out, two themes emerged:

1. A preference for shifting to private versus public engagement, and
2. Ease of, and lack of consequences for, quitting.

Many of those we spoke with who were in structured OST programs entered a period of – or were always predisposed toward – either a casual or more private enjoyment of arts. An instructor who requires that participants dig deeper and push themselves asks for a type of engagement antithetical to these tweens' preferences, creating discomfort. Drop-

<sup>9</sup> Although developmentally tweens are very concerned with peer group opinion, they were loath to attribute their decisions to peer pressure. However, in our teen groups, participants more easily reflected back on their tween years and acknowledged the role of peers in their decisions about their activities during their free time.

ping out of the OST program doesn't necessarily indicate boredom with or disengagement from their art, therefore; it might simply signal a poor fit between their current interest and program structure. Equally plausible is the emergence or re-emergence of a barrier, such as resources (money) or peer norms (a new set of friends who are not supportive) that a young person may present publicly as boredom.

The threshold for how powerful any of the reasons for quitting needs to be before moderately arts-engaged tween

### TWEEN COMMENTS FROM FOCUS GROUPS, IN RESPONSE TO QUERY: 'TELL US ABOUT HOW DECISIONS ARE MADE ABOUT WHAT ACTIVITIES YOU PARTICIPATE IN.'

"I would find out a whole bunch of information about it. Then I would ask my mom. And if she said no, I would keep on looking. And if she still says no, I would beg her."

— *Fifth-Grade Girl, Cleveland*

"I have 75 percent of the power. I make more of the decision. I say there's a thing I think I want to do. She would have to make sure it is O.K."

— *Fifth-Grade Boy, Newark*

"I decide what I want to do; mom decides if it is O.K. or not."

— *Fifth-Grade Girl, San Francisco*

### PARENT COMMENTS FROM FOCUS GROUPS, DESCRIBING THE DECISION / NEGOTIATION PROCESS ON OST IN THEIR HOUSEHOLDS.

"We want better for our kids than we have, so we say yes when they ask. You want them to have as much positive in their life since there is so much negative out there." — *Parent of Sixth-Grader, Birmingham*

"We tried Boy Scouts. I made him go to a couple of meetings, but he was not really interested in doing it, so we quit. It's not worth the time and money if he does not want to do it."

— *Parent of Fifth-Grader, Cleveland*



would quit is extremely low, and the speed of the decision to stop participating is quite fast. Tweens need not be bored for weeks and weeks before they conclude a program is not for them. Their interest need only wane a little before they start looking for the next best thing, disengaging from the current activity to focus on a competing pastime, such as hanging with their friends or virtual connections via their smartphones or a different OST program. After that, young people told us, they rarely return. Similarly, a single incident during which the practice of the art form pushes them beyond their comfort zone might cause them to quit – and might be one reason why some organizations see the easy wins and low pressure of arts and crafts as preferable to more demanding arts programs.

The power tweens have over their OST program choices is as much about their tendency to drop out rapidly if not sufficiently stimulated as it is the activities they select. While we did not collect longitudinal data, the empirical evidence from youth development professionals and researchers alike is that young people make decisions today – perhaps enabled by the always connected, everything-at-my-fingertips culture – at lightning speed. The advent of mobile communications and social media means tweens have access to an unending stream of information about social circles, activities and whereabouts of their friends, which is both a distraction from and a veritable menu of alternatives to structured OST activities.

Various sources peg adolescents' time online to anywhere from four to eight hours per day. A *Harvard Business Review* contributor asserts the amount of time young people spend on the Internet has tripled in the past 10 years, and in many cases, young people are media multitasking, packing an average of eight and a half hours of media

into six and a half hours a day (Erickson, 2010). Whether the connection between mobile communications and instant messaging, and a tween's ability to be present and focused and to persevere through adversity, is causal or casual, we can only guess. But it is clear tweens expect immediate outcomes and a range of choices, and they sense "the next best thing" might be around the corner. No matter how happy they are with an activity, tweens are left wondering, "What am I missing?" – and they have the tools and social network to figure out exactly what that is. Kit Yarrow captures this by pointing out "the word 'trend' was good enough 10 years ago. Now we say 'trending.' This is the perfect example of how fast things move [for today's tweens]. We can't stay on something long enough to actually call it a trend" (Yarrow and O'Donnell, 2012).

The shortened time span in which to grab a tween's attention or be shunted aside extends to OST programs: The activities must engage youth quickly. Tweens in our groups expect to be active and stimulated almost immediately; then they want this experience sustained – and express a low tolerance for dissatisfaction. If a program doesn't grab them, they are much more likely to quit than to stick it out and see if it improves.

Perhaps what is most surprising is the degree of parental tolerance for tweens' decisions to quit an OST arts program. Some appeared resigned to the fact that if their child's interest were to wane they would not be able to make him or her stick it out. For others, this attitude is rooted in their own previously discussed beliefs about arts: that it is a nice-to-have but not an economic pathway out. As a result, they see the young person's shift in interest as a sign of growing up, rather than the loss of a pathway to potential satisfaction, self-expression and achievement.



When evaluating a program for her tween daughter, Roxanne, a mother in Cleveland, asked, “What’s her future? Is it beneficial to her being a doctor if that’s her goal?” Without parents mandating participation or persistence, as they said they often do with sports, church activities or academics, the tweens in our study had few exit barriers, and a desire to quit would be met with little parental resistance.

Given that OST arts is a choice they need to opt into (versus opt out of) and the preponderance of barriers that may hinder their involvement, it is no surprise many tweens do not find their way into these programs or don’t remain after starting. We asked the tweens what might lead them to try new OST arts activities or remain in a structured program. Tweens suggested their aversion to long-term commitments, at least, could in part be addressed by the introduction of a trial period. They saw the existence of a trial as a signal that the onus was on the instructor to make the program engaging and attract participants. The opportunity to try out a program was mentioned across many groups as an element that would encourage enrollment.

Another approach our tweens suggested was the use of demonstrations, such as a brief performance in a school or community center, where they can see young people – ideally those to whom they can relate – having fun and displaying skills, to create excitement that can lead to trial or full enrollment. Because of the ambivalence felt by many tweens



**“Tweens need not be bored for weeks and weeks before they conclude a program is not for them.”**



toward structured OST arts programs, along with their propensity for rapid disengagement in activities they do not deem to be sufficiently interesting, trial program sessions and demonstrations *must* strive for the tweens’ sweet spot: activities challenging enough to be stimulating but not such a stretch they seem to tweens to lie beyond their abilities.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The sweet spot described here relates to the state of flow, the positive psychological state of optimal experience as identified and described by psychologist and researcher Mihály Csikszentmihályi. This paper further relates findings to Csikszentmihályi’s work on flow in Chapter 2, Principle #4 on high expectations.



## **TWEENS HAVE CLEAR CRITERIA FOR PARTICIPATION IN STRUCTURED OUT-OF-SCHOOL-TIME ARTS PROGRAMS.**

Consumer market research often probes two kinds of needs: stated and latent, or hidden, needs. The logic is that stated needs are top-of-mind criteria that consumers believe they are looking for, such as product performance or low price. However, stated needs are almost always based on existing models the consumer has experienced and tend to express a lot of bias. For example, consumers may state that safety and quality are the most important factors in deciding which car to buy, but those same consumers may actually buy the car whose design they like best, as long as safety and quality are adequate. In this example, aesthetics is the latent need – the underlying, often unexpressed need that is uncovered in research through a variety of inferential techniques including probing, contextual interviews, diaries, visioning exercises, forced choice exercises

and exploring what consumers actually purchased or used. A classic example is that when the first ATMs (automatic teller machines) were being developed, manufacturers asked consumers what they needed from banking, and consumers stated they wanted longer teller hours. The latent, underlying need was access to their money on their own schedule – which the ATM delivered – but since the only reference point and the way people got access to money at the time was through tellers, they stated their needs in terms of their existing models. The game-changing ATM was beyond imagination.

Needs analysis is critical to market research because humans are goal-seeking beings. Despite what we say about eating healthy, being environmentally conscious or valuing educa-



*A Spy Hop artist mentor, Koffi Sessi, works with young people on a sound editing project. Photo courtesy of Spy Hop.*

tion, our decisions are driven by options that satisfy our greatest needs, whether they are stated or latent. Our research explored both types of needs to better understand how young people viewed arts programs from their current experience or imagination, and what kinds of elements, if built into arts programs, might address underlying needs.

We asked the tweens in our research to share their perceptions of what did and did not work regarding their experiences with OST arts programs, and to try to imagine what factors might make these activities appealing. With the more highly engaged teens, we sought insights into whether and how they overcame barriers and their decision process in becoming more active consumers of structured OST arts programs.

A clear, repeated, consistent set of criteria emerged from these conversations, regardless of geographic location, ethnicity or age. Young people care a lot about what their program experience is like. And they have very clear opinions about the elements programs need to offer. We derived these criteria from tweens' stated and inferred needs; the latter were derived from discussions about chosen OST activities and the reasons young people drop out. These underlying needs drive tweens' criteria for participation, and are listed on page 41.

### **Tweens' and Teens' OST Arts Program Criteria and Related Underlying Needs**

We should mention at the outset that, as we've already seen, tweens told us the main criterion for their elective participation in any activity is fun. This is the most unifying concept discussed across all groups. Some tweens defined fun through the lens of social interaction, some were looking to be challenged, and others needed a creative outlet. Because "fun" is subject to interpretation and not particularly actionable by itself, the researchers delved deeper to understand more fully what that idea really meant, however; and here the themes became much more diverse. In fact, the probing developed two sets of needs: stated and latent.

In the context of our research, a stated need was an explicit request and often was accompanied by reference points to past experiences. For example, when young people insisted on having expert instructors, they usually related that to a time when they had an expert guiding an OST activity and found it invaluable, or when their instructor was *not* expert and the effect on the experience was noticeable.

Latent needs are the underlying drivers of behavior; they are called latent, or derived, needs because respondents do not state them outright but may arrive at them through probes about why something is important. For example, many

young people said they wanted rules and no yelling; when asked why, they said to keep things orderly. When asked why that was important, they revealed they wanted to engage in their art without fear of ridicule or harassment, pointing to a derived, or latent, need for emotional and physical safety. Young people were able to more readily articulate a need for a physically safe environment, but the need for emotional safety was identified through facilitated discussion.

Researchers often view latent needs as more indicative of true motivation and resultant behavior than stated needs, which are sometimes mentioned simply because they are top of mind or expected (such as consumers who mention safety as their main need in a car, even if, in reality, their purchases are based more on styling or brand reputation). Skilled probing of why something is important often reveals the closely held values and beliefs that most correspond to behavior.

### Instructors are Practicing Professionals and Treat Participants Fairly

An engaging OST arts program instructor must do more than manage a room full of adolescents. As one San Francisco tween said, young people want “someone who knows what they’re doing, who’s been there, who’s done that.” This was repeated often and across younger and older tween groups in all regions where we conducted focus groups. They want to know that what they intend to learn is, or has been, practiced at a high level by their instructor. In fact, tweens emphasized real-world, practical experience as a key criterion in their evaluation of whether a particular person has the necessary expertise to be a credible instructor. In the hyper-fast, hyper-critical tween culture, few things signal that “this might not be worth my time” more than a generic youth development leader trying to stay a few chapters ahead of the participants.

CRITERIA / STATED NEED	UNDERLYING OR LATENT NEEDS
Fun	Novelty; stimulation; de-stressing
Expert instructor	Mastery
Attention from instructor; fair treatment	Mentors; external validation
Hands-on experiential learning; collaborative decision; equipment	Self-expression; autonomy; influence; access to resources
Safe environment; rules; no yelling/pushing; serious participants	Physical and emotional safety
Meeting new people; being with friends	Community; belonging
Culminating events; competition	Purpose; display of skill and mastery
Membership “badges,” such as T-shirts, greeting rituals, clothing patches	Belonging
Awards; trophies, certificates	Recognition and reinforcement
Field trips	Exposure to larger world
Snacks	Hunger; nutrition



*Young people told us they expect technology to play a significant role in the experiential learning that out-of-school time programs provide. The opportunity to use equipment not available at home or at school has great appeal for tweens and teens alike. Photo by David Newkirk. Courtesy of Spy Hop.*

These young people view instruction by nonexperts as akin to a “hustle.” Instructors’ qualifications can entice tweens to join a program and serve as a strong indicator as to whether to pay attention or disengage.

Steven, another quiet but confident young man in our Oakland discussion, talked about the importance and satisfaction that came from having a mentor with professional, real-world experience. He explained to us that “when you practice to perform ... [you want] a teacher that knows what they’re talking about. [My instructor] gets us gigs. We get to play for an audience.”

Tweens also spoke of their desire for fair treatment, enthusiastic instructors and the need to feel included and appreciated. Carla, one of the tweens in Birmingham, said emphatically, “Favoritism sucks. It makes you feel abandoned, left out. Don’t give you a chance to shine when teachers focus on the people that are better [sic]. They’re older. Don’t compare us to them.” Many shared that they feel discounted or talked down to by schoolteachers and some have had similar negative experiences with OST instructors or youth devel-



**“Instructors’ qualifications can entice tweens to join a program and serve as a strong indicator as to whether to pay attention or disengage.”**



opment staff. Clearly, the demeanor of the instructor and the way that person interacts with youth are important. Still, the

refrain young people voiced loudest was the value of the instructor's expertise. Said one fifth-grade boy from Newark: "They've gotta be famous, with experience winning championships and stuff like that ... or a professional. If not, then at least top notch, the best in New Jersey, someone's who been through it."

## Experiential Learning

The second aspect of OST programming tweens indicated would make these activities fun is experiential, project-driven learning. This approach has three components: the ability to choose their own projects, access to technology and digital media, and access to technology tools early in the program.

Tweens place a high value on selecting and shaping major elements of their work, from the subject to the type of media. To be sure, the desire for this level of independence increases in lockstep with two factors: age, as teens are more adamant about their freedom and flexibility than tweens; and interest in the art form, because individuals tend to desire autonomy only if they are self-motivated and willing to push themselves. Michael, a tween from Oakland, captured the appeal of programs that allow for autonomy when he said, "I don't want to draw what the teacher wants me to draw. I want to draw what I want to draw. I've got my own ideas. I'll ask for help if I need it." One sixth-grader from Birmingham had similar sentiments that, in the ideal program "you can do whatever you want, use whatever you want ... just everyone sitting down drawing, sculpting, doing whatever they want." Tweens respond readily to opportunities that are immediate, tangible and involve progressive skill building and exploration. Feeling self-directed enables the participants to shape their experience and learn in ways that are meaningful to them, and that, in turn, strengthens their interest in and commitment to OST arts programming. As a seventh-grade girl from Philadelphia said, "Let us do it on our own so we can learn on our own."

Young people we talked with also expect technology to play a significant role in the experiential learning OST programs provide. The opportunity to get access to equipment not available at home or at school has great appeal for tweens and teens alike, and has the potential to serve as a strong hook for immediate engagement. Because digital media is central to the lives of tweens and teens, they also expect it to be incorporated into programming, when and where appropriate.

Further, tweens and teens are accustomed to popular arts and entertainment crossing boundaries with exciting new combinations and hybrids of styles and art forms. Whereas

rap artists of the 1980s made and sold records, it is not unusual for a popular music artist today to be a fully developed brand with websites, a YouTube channel, a fashion line, licensed merchandise or even a reality show. So it is only natural that young people increasingly expect creative expression to bridge various media. They seek out experiences that integrate multiple disciplines – especially if it includes digital media – rather than strictly adhere to a single art form.

An example of this seamless integration of different media came up in a Cleveland focus group in which the moderator was talking to girls about their fondness for designing clothes. One tween named Cynthia not only integrated art form and media but also saw a clear entrepreneurial opportunity: "I want to design the clothes; sew them; take a picture of my friend, Charise, in them because she's tall and pretty; send them out over Twitter and Tumblr; and then get orders to make more so I can make money."

### FOCUS GROUP COMMENTS IN ANSWER TO THE QUESTION: "WHO SHOULD LEAD OR INSTRUCT YOUR IDEAL PROGRAM?"

"It's better if they earn a living from that; you would feel more secure in what they know."

— *Seventh - to Eighth-Grade Boy, Oakland*

"Teachers [should be] professionals, so people won't get someone who doesn't know what they're doing."

— *Seventh - to Eighth-Grade Boy, Newark*

"If a teacher is too serious, people will get depressed and leave. If it's too fun, nothing will get done."

— *Eighth-Grade Boy, Newark*

"[Teachers should push] hard enough so they let me know I can do it, but not so hard that it makes me want to quit."

— *Seventh-Grade Boy, Oakland*

"Someone who makes sure everybody gets a chance to shine."

— *Sixth-Grade Girl, Philadelphia*

While singularly focused programs often match the competency and comfort zone of the artist instructor, they may lack the variety and media integration – or the entrepreneurial spirit – that more closely mirror the everyday lives of the urban, low-income tweens with whom we spoke. The risk to programs that fail to integrate with related media is that youth may disengage; as discussed earlier, they may do so quickly and with little consequence.

Many tweens who sign up for an OST arts program do so to learn something they cannot on their own; but inasmuch as they need the programs to provide access to the latest technology, there is a real “show-me-the-money” attitude that the program has to deliver the goods. Importantly, it must do so at the outset. Tweens told us they don’t want a lot of classroom-style lecture time before they get to actually touch the equipment; that model does not align with their needs. Tweens judge many programs by what they get access to, and when. A tween girl from Philadelphia said, “I don’t want to talk about it a lot; I want to just get straight to it.” For tweens, passive learning feels like school, and they want their OST experience to be distinct from school. In fact, the same sense of immediacy that shapes their online behavior is in play here; young people will disengage if they sense they are waiting too long for the fun to begin. The onus is on the program to captivate tweens from the outset.

### Safe Environment

Another aspect of the program environment tweens said they seek is rules, which can help them feel a program is going to be well run and safe; the young people frequently mentioned they want other youth to be well behaved and serious. In Birmingham, Jasmine voiced the concerns of many in the group, who nodded in agreement, when she said she wanted a situation where the “teacher has control of the class, that it’s safe, where bad stuff doesn’t happen while you’re there.” A Cleveland tween boy said, “In every program, you always got somebody that is not up to the standard; they cut into our class time.” Tweens were vocal about their desire to be free from some of the misbehavior of peers they experience in school, another key criterion.

Tweens also discussed their desire for programs to take place in an environment that is warm and friendly. Jasmine from Birmingham said, “It should feel welcoming from the minute you walk in. People should look at you with smiles on their faces. Teachers should care that you’re there.”

### Prospect of New Friends

Consistent with tweens’ increasing focus on their peer group

and peer approval, the prospect of participating in OST activities with friends or as a path to forming new relationships is a draw for tweens. While we have discussed the appeal of having friends participate in a given OST program, many of the young people also described the programs as one of the few opportunities to get to know people outside of their immediate neighborhood or school. “Meeting new people” frequently was cited as one of the reasons tweens might try a new activity. As Kelly from Newark said, “I like to meet new people. That’s the whole reason I wanted to do track this year.” By the way, Kelly was about to quit her participation in a dance program in order to join the track team.



**“For tweens, passive learning feels like school, and they want their OST experience to be distinct from school.”**



### Culminating or Competitive Events

When Steven, one of the tweens in the research, spoke about an instructor who not only had real-world experience playing performances but also had booked a gig for his young players, the other boys were intrigued. There was something in what he said that struck a chord. Steven articulated perfectly what had been bantered about the room (and across cities) – that culminating or competitive events are an engaging element of OST arts programming.

It may seem counterintuitive that young people, who are at a stage of development where they experience heightened self-consciousness and anxiety about being judged, are enthused by the idea of competition and showcasing their abilities. Yet, they said they are. That was true even after expressing concerns about trying out an arts program because they did not think they would be very good at it.

To be sure, culminating events are often part of project-based learning approaches that tweens described; the goal of such a curriculum is to work toward the creation of something, such as an art show, a recital, a play or a media project.



*A sense of community fills the green room backstage at Youth Speaks' Grand Slam Finals. Photo by Ashleigh Reddy. Courtesy of Youth Speaks.*

And there was a range of preferences among tweens regarding the intensity and stakes of these events. But most of the young people seemed to view competition as a means to motivate effort, showcase work and gain recognition. Turning something creative or educational into a competition through the introduction of game elements such as voting, scoring, leader boards and achievement badges is increasingly common, and it is based on the insight that these elements can be highly engaging. This is a common part of our experience; shows that used to showcase talent such as Star Search have morphed into complex games with voting, immunity, and strategy such as American Idol.

For many tween girls involved in school cheerleading, with its blend of choreography and athleticism, competition was one of the primary draws.<sup>11</sup> Because of a limited frame of reference, much of the tweens' discussion about competition referred to non-arts programs, but the appeal was apparent and was also referenced in the context of certain art forms.

For some tweens, the attraction is in having an opportunity

<sup>11</sup> Other points of appeal for cheerleading as a structured OST activity were physical prowess, its association with dance and choreography, and attractive outfits. Less explicitly stated, but indicated, was the spotlighting, social appeal or badge value that appears to be associated with the activity.

to showcase their work or talent. Chymeka, a Birmingham tween, was not very confident in her ability to win a competition. Still, she was interested in showing how much she had improved and explained that "competition is fine as long as it's not too much, as long as it's friendly competition ... something that shows maybe I wasn't as good when I started, but now I'm better." In Newark, fifth-grader Brandon presented his view that the program instructors need to "make it so that everybody feels welcome ... competitive, but good sportsmanship so nobody feels bad if they lose. ... I would tell [my friends] to come to the [performance]. ... It helps your popularity."

For teenagers at the Boys & Girls Club West End House in Boston and at New Urban Arts, an independent arts organization in Providence, culminating events are motivating milestones and eagerly anticipated showcase opportunities.<sup>12</sup>

The teens at the West End House in Boston point to the "Club Idol" singing competition as a popular draw, even for

<sup>12</sup> Though we heard similar enthusiasm for competition from moderately arts-engaged tweens, we wanted to note that the teens we spoke with had participated in OST arts programming at the Boys & Girls Club and at NUA, which has a cross-referral relationship with the local YMCA, for some length of time and were at a stage of comfort with each other, and with exploration in the arts.

those whose ongoing participation had waned. Katey spoke of her experience at the event's inception: "I never thought I could sing but they asked me to. After that I was always in the music room. People grew up and left. After that it was weird and I didn't go anymore. But I still sing in Club Idol. I come back whenever I have free time." Roughly a quarter of the teenagers here indicated that competing family, school and job responsibilities had reduced the amount of time they could devote to structured arts programming. Still, they made a special effort to take part in Club Idol.

At New Urban Arts in Providence, the space is configured to showcase teens' finished pieces, as well as large-scale works in progress. During a tour, young artists proudly walked the space presenting their artist statements and their art and spoke excitedly about their yet-to-be-finished works. Developing pieces for presentation was a key component in their evident motivation and persistence.

### **Additional Stated and Latent Needs**

Asked what sort of things made *any* kind of program an activity they would want to join, the tweens offered that snacks are always a popular draw. In the case studies discussed in the next section, program administrators emphasized that while many young people tend to display voracious appetites, in the case of low-income youth their hunger often is more acute and serious. Some report the young people get a substantial portion of their primary nutrition for the day through the program's offerings, so it is important to provide "real food," not just snacks. Within the context of our research with young people, desire for snacks was universal, even if not a top need, and programs are advised to consider offering nutritious and substantial food options to meet this desire.

Young people also mentioned T-shirts, bracelets, trophies and other symbols of membership, affiliation or recognition, as being appealing. They cited field trips as a draw; within the context or curriculum of an arts program, field trips were cited as providing a "real world experience." As appealing as they are, such outings may be more rare in this day and age given cuts to public school funding. These additional benefits of participation can help low-income youth meet fundamental needs of clothing and food, and they also help satisfy other desires expressed by tweens, such as a sense of membership, belonging and achievement. While perhaps not pressing enough on their own to motivate tweens to participate, in combination with other criteria, such as expert instructors or hands-on learning, they provide important elements tweens require in OST arts programming.

## **Minor Distinctions Among Sub-Groups**

While the broad themes were consistent across all the young people we interviewed, there were some interesting distinctions among some groups in our study, which we highlight below.<sup>13</sup>

### **AGE**

Younger tweens, in fifth and sixth grades, expressed more openness to trying new things, eagerness to expand friendships and social networks, and likelihood of pursuing multiple interests (versus a more focused, single form), as compared with older (seventh- and eighth-grade) tweens. Importantly, this openness included greater willingness to participate in nonclassroom-based arts programming and extracurricular activities. As tweens enter the seventh or eighth grades, they seem to age disproportionately; these years bring on a level of weariness, wariness and heightened sensitivity to the mores of their peer groups, accompanied by increasing consideration of the potential for new activities to cause scrutiny, embarrassment or ridicule. They approach new activities with more caution due to their fear of appearing to be a novice and focus more on reasons not to do something, whereas younger tweens are generally guided by curiosity and enthusiasm. The older tweens also showed increasing discomfort in and sensitivity to being associated with younger children and activities connected to the younger set – unless they are in a mentoring role.

### **GENDER**

Both boys and girls expressed interest in and the appeal of athletics, but boys were more likely to: focus most of their attention on sports, connect participation to life skills and aspire to be a professional athlete. Girls showed more interest in activities that allowed them to express themselves both physically and creatively and to use their own bodies as a medium for creativity through cheerleading, fashion design, modeling and self-photography. Boys' interests in creative expression were often paired with an athletic pursuit, such as designing sports equipment or apparel. Overall, boys – particularly older boys – were more resistant to arts engagement and less likely to reveal their interests in arts or arts programming than girls; compared to boys, girls were more likely to list an arts pursuit as a favorite activity, were much more likely to aspire to be an artist when they grow up and were much more likely to say the person they want to meet is an artist.

Importantly, these private differences play out in social

<sup>13</sup> Because sample sizes were small and this work was purely qualitative, quantitative extrapolation would not be accurate and so the magnitude of the differences was not detailed.



settings as well. Unless they could demonstrate mastery or high potential, older boys were much more likely to express an absence of social permission to engage in arts. They felt as though their interest needs to be justified and accepted by friends and family, making participation a more socially risky pursuit. For some, this meant that arts in public places held less appeal, but for some others, arts conducted in locations known for sports may offer more social permission and appeal to boys who might never go out of their way to attend an arts program in an arts-dedicated space. With this conflicting information, the best course is to ensure programs aimed at boys convey acceptance: that participation is fun and cool, and other boys are doing it too.

### ETHNICITY

There were few variations among tweens based on ethnicity; the only one of note was that Asian tweens expressed less independence in selecting their OST activities than their non-Asian peers. Such choices in Asian households were often driven by the parents, so the decision-making process, which usually was characterized as a tween-led negotiation, was far more parent-driven. Many of the Asian tweens also said their participation in arts OST programs was not voluntary but rather was to satisfy a parent's insistence or requirement. Asian parents saw more of a connection between arts mastery and both life and career skills than did non-Asian parents; they saw arts as a way to improve focus, make their children more well rounded, and assist in admissions to college. This dynamic may suggest that to reach Asian tweens, an approach to attraction and enrollment should address the parents more than the tweens.

African-American boys seemed to have the greatest number of barriers between them and OST arts activities, including a strong sense by parents that arts are not as important as sports as a pathway to vocational opportunities, and that arts participation does not generate nearly as much social currency as sports engagement. Analysis of journal entries revealed high levels of interest in acting, music and dance programs among African-American youth of all ages and genders, which makes the multitude of barriers they face all the more troubling.

Hispanic youth and families, for the most part, exhibited more similarities than differences across most areas of our research exploration. There were some strong sentiments expressed by Hispanic parents about formality, specifically who was reaching out to their children for OST programs and if they approached the family with signs of respect for parental authority. Hispanic parents also emphasized

the need for practical life skills over self-expression and artistic mastery.

### LEVEL OF ARTS ENGAGEMENT

Our sample of tweens consisted of respondents who expressed some interest in arts. About half were involved in a structured program and half were not. Interestingly, involvement in a structured program was not a good indicator of either emotional engagement in the arts or prospective interest in new arts programming (the idea that participation is not a good indicator of interest is, in essence, the corollary to our earlier observation that low enrollment is not a valid sign of the community's actual interest in arts).

Based on a combination of attitudinal and behavioral factors, we identified three segments of tweens. Within each segment, there was a consistent profile of what the tweens were seeking and what their interest and level of emotional engagement were. The three segments were:

- **“Casual Dabblers”**: These tweens were engaged in arts primarily by unstructured and organic means, usually for short periods or intervals of time. While there was a range of levels of engagement in terms of time spent, their primary driver was to have fun, make friends, get access to art supplies and enjoy art in a nonthreatening environment. They had no long-term artistic ambitions or motivation to take their skills to a new level but saw structured programs as a fun way to get access to resources and gain permission to practice their art.
- **“Serious Learners”**: More likely to be involved in structured programs, the tweens in this segment had a range of experiences with arts programming, although few were fully satisfied with their experiences. They found appeal in a structured program's ability to facilitate, guide or “push” students and in outcomes such as skill development. In fact, the main motivation for these tweens was to learn or further develop a skill.
- **“Specialists”**: The smallest of the three segments, tweens in this segment were highly engaged and self-motivated and had well-developed skills. They valued the high standards set by both instructors and their peers. They had artistic aspirations, and their primary motivation was to develop mastery.

Across the three segments, there was a great deal of consistency in the tweens' criteria and preferences for an “ide-

al arts program,” such as emphasis on a professional or expert artist as an instructor, a safe environment, opportunities to display a product in a culminating event, tangible signs of participation and a hands-on or experiential approach. The main distinctions across the segments are highlighted in the table below.<sup>14</sup>

### MARKETS

Research was conducted in Cleveland, Newark, Philadelphia, Boston, Providence, Birmingham and San Francisco/Oakland. Among these areas, the only notable outlier in terms of results was San Francisco/Oakland, where we saw:

- Higher awareness of the benefits of arts participation
- Higher awareness of available arts programming in the community
- Greater variation in tween OST activities

Tweens in Birmingham had the highest expression of interest in the arts and its appeal to them, and tweens in Cleveland expressed very high levels of interest in and commitment to sports. Parents in Cleveland groups were also likely to see professional sports as a realistic career aspiration.

### PERSONALITY TYPE

Tweens who exhibited high levels of compassion – defined in our research as individuals who were more likely to agree with statements indicating a need for more social connection such as, “I like to cooperate with others,” “I like to take care of others,” and “I like to know that others can count on me” – also expressed higher than average interest in participating in new programming. Their art forms of choice were also skewed toward media arts, fashion, music and performing arts. We also observed that, not surprisingly, extroverts expressed greater interest in performing arts, whereas introverts preferred more solitary pursuits, such as graphic arts.

### Conclusion

Seven cities and more than 200 tween and teen voices later, what have we learned?

First, because urban, low-income youth are not a homogenous group, they vary in their needs, desires and responsiveness to incentives with respect to arts engagement. As a result, any approach to addressing barriers and reaching this target audience – like any consumer engagement strategy – is going to meet with mixed results and will be stronger with some groups of young people and weaker with others.

CRITERIA (ONLY DIFFERENTIATED CRITERIA LISTED)	“CASUAL DABLERS”	“SERIOUS LEARNERS”	“SPECIALISTS”
Dedicated spaces that convey a commitment to the arts being practiced	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Desire for less structured, more “open studio” type format	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓
Extrinsic motivation (being challenged / pushed by instructor)	✓	✓✓	✓✓✓
Development of positive, respectful, nurturing relationships with mentors and instructors	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Rules / behavior enforcement that convey a level of structure and focus on outcomes	✓	✓✓	✓✓✓

14 On other criteria, emphasis was similar across groups.

1 check = low emphasis; 2 checks = moderate emphasis; 3 checks = high emphasis



*Overall, within the population studied – tweens with moderate levels of interest in arts – demand for structured programming is low, but interest in exceptional experiences is high, leaving the door wide open if organizations can provide tweens with programs that are a departure from the old models and instead are built around their clearly expressed wants. Photo courtesy of SAY St.*



**“[N]othing is as influential as peer recommendations.”**



Second, finding and satisfying demand for this consumer group is filled with challenges – from stated low levels of interest in OST arts programs and motivation, as well as communications obstacles related to a narrow definition of “the arts,” to scarcity of resources, competing activities and social barriers. Anyone trying to entice such a consumer must navigate perceptual and practical barriers to build and sustain engagement. Yet, there is reason for optimism. The good news is that, because the feedback from tweens about their program preferences was generally consistent across gender,

race and geography, we have an emerging blueprint for how to improve programs to appeal to these young people’s attitudes, interests and needs.

The most immediate and obvious conclusion is that with so many challenges, the size of the group of young people who can overcome all of them is a subset of the young, urban, low-income youth who could benefit from arts engagement. What became clear in the research is that some young people had a behavioral predisposition toward involvement. This group valued the social interactions and opportunities of arts engagement, such as making friends or competition. They also were more inclined to seek out instruction through a structured program versus private lessons.

It may seem to be a circular argument to suggest structured programs target their offerings to young people who seem to be most open to structured activities. But we believe there is a deeper insight here. These two dimensions (structured vs. unstructured programs, and participation with friends vs. private enjoyment) actually define a range of ways in which young people can participate in the arts. For example, those who do not wish to do creative work with friends because



*We learned from focus groups, like the one shown here, that tween boys can be reluctant to appear to be a novice in front of their peers. Video still by Wil Weldon.*

they see their art as “me time” but who still like structure may be more suited to private lessons, possibly with online support, rather than classes. And if those young people don’t like structure, they might participate in art at their own pace, self-taught through observation, reading or online observation and tutorials. Similarly, young people who like to be a part of a peer community but are less inclined (or not able) to be part of a structured program may find a community of like-minded peers online, on their block or in other venues; we heard from many tweens who did art in small, self-managed groups, rotating among the members’ homes.

The point is that, while the structured, instructor-led, program approach is but one of several ways to engage young people in arts, it is generally the way community-based organizations deliver programming. Not all young people are behaviorally inclined to respond to this approach. One cannot assess a community’s demand for arts solely by the enrollment numbers of an OST arts program, because choosing to sit out a structured program may simply mean such a program is not a good fit for those individuals. Which brings up another important point: To reach a broader audience and meet young people where they are, a variety of approaches, tailored to their needs, may result in greater overall engagement and participation. Organizations may look at facilitating engagement through self-directed learning, open studio space or even one-on-one lessons, if there are sufficient resources. And finally, it is important to bear in mind that these preferences are not static. Because

they are behavioral, they refer to what young people do, not what they say or feel. As such, preferences may change with time, or may vary by art form. So one young person could pursue a private, self-led mode of engagement for drawing but a structured, social, instructor-led approach to dancing. The concept of tailoring offerings or messages to different subgroups is a form of segmentation strategy; see callout box on page 51 for a more detailed explanation.

In the case of the arts market, youth development organizations already practice segmentation: by age, gender or interest. The behavior-based segmentation we suggest has one limitation: It is not easily addressable. In other words, young people who might want to participate in arts through structured, social programs seem to be interspersed with other young people. There is no efficient way to reach out to these specific individuals to announce a program without putting the message out to a much broader and potentially less interested population, hoping the ones we want to connect with will see it and respond.

But the behavioral segmentation provides opportunity, too. It breaks the mold of thinking about arts participation in terms of a single delivery approach and opens possibilities to recognize many forms of arts engagement. The opportunity youth development organizations have is to think not only about different art forms but also about different ways to encourage young people to engage in arts. This segmentation also helps organizations and funders calibrate their ap-

proach based on the expected response from various groups. But even within instructor-led programs, the area that is traditionally the focus of arts programming, the research supports the idea that those efforts are ripe for a design and youth-engagement makeover.

Third, the increased importance of the social circle is not just a developmental transition; it also signals a shift in how information flows to the tween. As children enter their tween years, both marketers and peers recognize that these young people are starting to make more of their own decisions, and so they are bombarded with options, offers, and opportunities. But they told us, while fliers in schools and community centers do get their attention, nothing is as influential as peer recommendations. And while this may be true for people of all ages, it is especially important to tweens whose concern over peer group approval is extremely high. Tweens reported recommendations and suggestions of their peers are both a source of information on programs and a means of assessing a program's appeal. Tweens also mentioned demonstrations (such as in school assemblies) as effective ways of generating interest. In terms of media, tweens found fliers in schools, community centers, churches and even barber shops to be good sources, but an Internet presence is also required;



**“[I]nterest in exceptional experiences is high – leaving the door wide open if organizations can provide tweens with programs that are a departure from the old models and instead are built around their clearly expressed needs.”**



## CONSUMER SEGMENTATION FOR TAILORED MESSAGING AND MARKETING EFFICIENCY

In marketing, researchers often employ a technique called consumer segmentation. This approach is about defining clusters of consumers who have more in common with each other than they do with everyone else. In other words, there is more similarity within a cluster than across clusters. Segmentation enables two key goals of marketing. First, it increases efficiency. If a segment is identified as the target, or intended users, of a product or service, the marketer can save resources by directing marketing only to that group. Second, it enables the marketer to tailor the message for the audience. For example, there may be a group of sports enthusiasts who subscribe to a sports magazine. In the winter, some like football and others prefer mountain sports, such as skiing and snowboarding. In summer, some like baseball and others opt for golf. The publisher can tailor the amount of content in different sports, and even change the cover, based on consumer preferences.

Elements that define segments vary, too. Some segmentation analyses use beliefs and attitudes as the basis for defining segments; political segmentation is a classic example. Others use demographics such as age, race, gender and income, or behaviors such as how often people fly or how many pizzas they eat per week. In order for segmentation to work, a segment must have definable characteristics, which makes it actionable. For example, a segment might be defined as retired people or grandparents or adults ages 60 to 80, or risk-averse investors, but “old enough to be wise” is not helpful because wisdom is not easily defined. Segments also need to be addressable: Marketers need to be able to find members of the targeted segment, so the message can be delivered. “Consumers who dislike cilantro” is a defined segment but not addressable, because those consumers cannot be isolated from the general population through easy or inexpensive means. A third characteristic is that there should be data or empirical evidence that one segment will respond to an offer differently from another segment. So if we were marketing a kid-oriented vegetable juice to parents, it would make no sense to segment on the basis of education or job status, but it might be useful to segment based on number of children living at home or attitudes and behaviors that indicate a preference for healthy eating.

parents say they prefer to vet programs online for cost, time and location, more information on the specifics of the program, organization reputation, experience of the instructors and safety information.

Another consideration in the marketing of OST arts programs is the brand or reputation of the organization sponsoring the program. During our discussions, tweens had a hard time imagining their ideal arts program – the ones with the best instructors, inspiring spaces, experiential learning and safe environments – in some of the best known youth development organizations because those groups are more associated with sports leagues, camp or arts and crafts as opposed to high-quality arts programs. This translates to some organizations' reputations giving them the credibility to move seamlessly into high-quality OST arts programs, while others may face more skeptical consumers and an altogether tougher challenge.

Overall, within the population studied – tweens with moderate levels of interest in arts – demand for structured programming is low, but interest in exceptional experiences is high – leaving the door wide open if organizations can provide tweens with programs that are a departure from the old models and instead are built around their clearly expressed needs. Lowering barriers is important, and specifically reducing permission barriers is key. Both tweens and parents found their way around practical barriers such as cost and transportation if a program was worthwhile, but social acceptance was a heavier burden. And while there was some variation by age, gender, ethnicity and location, overall the characteristics that made a program more engaging were consistent across all these variables.

### Addressing the Demand Challenges

It is interesting to note that what young people who are interested in programs say they want – instructor artist credentials, inspiring physical space, social and emotional support elements, hands-on exposure to technology (where applicable), integration of arts with technology, social media and social enterprise – aligns with many of the KOL and case study-informed principles discussed in the next section (10 Principles for Effective, High-Quality OST Arts Programs, pg. 54). Which means, quite simply, that the success principles used in arts programs primarily with highly engaged youth are directly applicable to and desired by their moderately engaged counterparts and may very well move these young people to the next level. Those principles may not be easy to implement, especially if they are new to an organization's culture or operations. But their validity seems to be particularly strong, because there is alignment between

what experts believe will work and what today's young people say they want. In this case, it is likely that following the blueprint suggested by both consumers and experts will have a positive impact in the field.

How might youth move from a place of being unlikely to participate in or try an OST arts program to greater openness or actual enrollment? A number of implications emerged from the research for how to lower barriers and trigger young people's motivation to participate. Because the target audience exhibits different challenges across key areas such as overt desire, resources, and peer and family support, varied approaches are needed. Three factors are involved: a desire to participate, the resources to participate, and the perception that it is normal within the peer group to participate. When two or all three factors are absent, any program would have an uphill battle to connect with a young person and sustain engagement. But when at least two factors are present, there are specific tactics OST programs can employ. With that in mind, here are three common situations and how to take action to address them:

#### **Situation #1: Lacking Resources and Opportunities**

The desire is present, the cultural norms and perceptions are supportive, but the resources and opportunities are lacking.

**PRIMARY AUDIENCE:** Girls; younger tweens; tweens with interest in the arts. Although this situation could refer to anyone, girls and younger tweens are called out because, throughout the research, they often had the desire to participate and the peer support to do so. When they did not take part, it often was due to pragmatic or resource barriers.

**CHALLENGE:** Create a program that meets their criteria and preferences and is accessible and affordable.

#### **SUGGESTIONS:**

- To the extent possible, address cost and transportation barriers
- Hold programs in dedicated spaces that indicate full embrace of the arts
- Offer a wide range of content (could include traditional and nontraditional arts)
- Employ project-based approach with culminating activities (productions, competitions, demonstrations)
- Use expert instructors

- Offer extras and proven incentives (tangible takeaways, snacks or meals, equipment, field trips)

### **Situation #2: Unfavorable Cultural Norms**

The need or desire is present, as are the resources and opportunities, but the cultural norms are not favorable.

**PRIMARY AUDIENCE:** Older boys; tweens with varying levels of interest in the arts but who don't feel sufficient social permission to deepen or continue their engagement.

**CHALLENGE:** Lower the permission threshold.

#### **SUGGESTIONS:**

- Clearly label/describe programs (referring to specific activities/genres rather than "arts")
- Offer nontraditional arts (such as sports design, media arts, video game design)
- Use unexpected spokespeople (athletes, for example)
- Emphasize novel, exciting experiences
- Build links with sports
- Offer separate programs for older tweens
- Provide information suggesting that arts programming is more common and thus more socially normal
- Inform parents of the links between arts education and their long-term goals for their children

### **Situation #3: Low Demand**

The cultural norms are supportive, the resources/opportunities are present, but the desire is not felt, often due to previous disappointing and/or low-quality or mediocre arts program experiences.

**PRIMARY AUDIENCE:** Tweens of both genders whose interest in the arts hasn't been sparked; those who have either outgrown their interest or whose past experiences have been with mediocre or off-putting arts programs. Most have a preferred alternative, usually a sports activity. Others are satisfied with their engagement with the arts by unstructured means.

**CHALLENGE:** Trigger curiosity and cultivate appetite for arts programming.

#### **SUGGESTIONS:**

- Emphasize the approach of the program and experience as much as content (access to expertise and technology, autonomy, collaboration, leadership, fun, novelty)
- Take an interdisciplinary approach to programming
- Excite potential participants with demonstrations and offer trial periods
- Provide access to new technology and equipment

The potential actions in the above situations seek to boost tweens' motivation and desire, while lowering permission barriers for participation. They may yield varying levels of response from different tween segments, but the actions, collectively, can address some of the most significant blockages to participation that our research revealed.

In order to build on existing interest to encourage enrollment in or trial of a program, organizations must go beyond communicating the availability of an arts activity to describing a type of experience. They need to make clear, through specific descriptions, they are offering certain pursuits and content that tweens otherwise probably wouldn't assume to be part of an arts program. Organizations must let tweens know they will not be lectured to, nor will they be enrolling in an arts-and-crafts class. Most of all, programs must convey this will be a high-level experience allowing for discovery, as well as social opportunities, and giving older youth the chance to have input and some autonomy.

In synthesizing our findings, we now have a set of insights gleaned from direct conversations with urban, low-income tweens for organizations that seek to encourage this group's participation in OST arts programs. These observations suggest a set of guidelines likely to heighten the appeal of an arts program, encourage consideration and trial and engage and sustain participation.

# CHAPTER

# 10 PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE, HIGH-QUALITY OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME ARTS PROGRAMS





Insights garnered from tweens and teens are essential for understanding how to create and deliver high-quality OST arts programs that meet the needs of low-income, urban youth. But as we noted, their own frameworks and experiences can limit the way consumers envision excellence. Practitioners, researchers, and administrators have the benefit of experience, access to research, information sharing and trial and error. And as professionals who have dedicated their careers to OST, the arts and youth development, they offer valuable perspectives on what works and why, and how to use these elements to achieve results.

To inform our understanding, we conducted our research on multiple fronts, starting with a literature review to assess the established knowledge in the fields of OST arts and youth development.

We next conducted interviews with a mix of key opinion leaders, including practitioners, researchers, and administrators, seeking their perspectives, observations and advice on a broad range of questions related to the project goals. The master interview discussion guides are in Appendix D. We also did case studies of eight organizations, which included site visits, program observation and interviews with executive and program staff and, in many cases, youth participants.

Ten principles for effective, high-quality OST arts programming emerged from this research. While some are unique to the arts, others have been highlighted in youth development literature before, although in our research often the arts applications were unique and noteworthy. The principles are listed below and are discussed and illustrated in greater detail in the following section of this report.

**Principle No. 1:** Instructors are professional, practicing artists, and are valued with compensation for their expertise and investment in their professional development.

**Principle No. 2:** Executive directors have a public commitment to high-quality arts programs that is supported by sustained action.

**Principle No. 3:** Arts programs take place in dedicated, inspiring, welcoming spaces and affirm the value of art and artists.

**Principle No. 4:** There is a culture of high expectations, respect for creative expression and an affirmation of youth participants as artists.

**Principle No. 5:** Programs culminate in high-quality public events with real audiences.

**Principle No. 6:** Positive relationships with adult mentors and peers foster a sense of belonging and acceptance.

**Principle No. 7:** Youth participants actively shape programs and assume meaningful leadership roles.

**Principle No. 8:** Programs focus on hands-on skill building using current equipment and technology.

**Principle No. 9:** Programs strategically engage key stakeholders to create a network of support for both youth participants and the programs.

**Principle No. 10:** Programs provide a physically and emotionally safe place for youth.

For many practitioners, the list of principles taken in its entirety may well be daunting. Most of the case study organizations are well established and have had years to get to where they are today. Burgeoning programs might first focus on two or three of the principles and build from that foundation over time. Our hope is that the list gives organizations a useful basis for developing and implementing effective programs.

PRINCIPLE  
NO. 1

**INSTRUCTORS ARE PROFESSIONAL, PRACTICING ARTISTS,  
AND ARE VALUED WITH COMPENSATION FOR THEIR EXPERTISE AND  
INVESTMENT IN THEIR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT.**



*A professional artist instructs a youth artist at the RiverzEdge Arts Project's screen-printing studio. Photo courtesy of RiverzEdge.*

Professional, practicing artists hold the key to youth engagement in OST arts programs. Young people are drawn to the artists' knowledge of technique, their real world experiences in the arts, and their energy and creativity. Professional artists have deep understanding of the creative process. Therefore, they are able to guide youth through the planning-producing-presenting-reflecting cycle, with its inevitable twists and turns, with insight and credibility. Of course, to be effective teaching artists also must have the desire and skills to work with youth.

Researchers in youth development and arts education concur with the need for an unwavering commitment to hiring professional, practicing artists as instructors. "A key prerequisite for instructors to whom kids will be drawn is that they are artists themselves with a strong portfolio. If they are doing something cool in the real world with art, kids will move toward that," said Jessica Davis, principal investigator of Project Co-Arts and founding director of the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Arts in Education Program. Gil Noam, a national leader in out-of-school time and scholarship on resilience and founder and director of the

Program in Education, Afterschool & Resiliency (PEAR) at Harvard, stated: “[Teaching artists] have to have expertise in the field they are teaching – that is what kids want and will respect.”

But organizations must do more than hire working artists. Programs should include teaching artists in management decisions. Moreover, organizations need to value artists as professionals by providing compensation that recognizes their expertise, investing in their development and empowering them in running their programs – all of which contribute significantly to the satisfaction and retention of these critical staff members. Retention is important because staff continuity and longevity support high-quality programming and the formation of relationships with youth.

### **Knowledge of Technique and Understanding of Artistic Process**

Working artists understand what it feels like to hit a wall on a project and have to identify alternative paths. For that reason, a professional can guide young people through this common experience within the creative process in a way that affirms their own ability to see multiple courses of action. Organizational leaders and youth participants affirmed that such artist instructors possess a unique credibility, and young people are more receptive to meeting high standards and project deadlines set by people with the same expectations for themselves.

Guillermina Zabala, media arts director at SAY Sí, a multi-media youth arts organization in San Antonio, commented: “For me it’s important [to be a working artist] because it’s a way of being in touch with the creative process. It’s very hard to explain to somebody how to go about a creative process – how to visualize something, how to break something apart, how to produce a specific piece of work – when you haven’t really done it yourself.”

Well-intentioned staff with arts avocations, re-assigned employees who have the arts added to their programming responsibilities and volunteers who are not professional artists undermine the quality of the program experience for youth participants. That’s because they lack a professional’s level of technique and familiarity with the artistic process. Hodari Davis of Youth Speaks said, “[When it comes to art, there is] this idea that ‘anybody can do it.’ But if you were hiring someone to teach kung fu, they better be a master, or a black belt. And the principle is the same for anything else.”

Employing professional artists as instructors also enhances skill building among youth – and that further contributes to



**“[A]rtist instructors possess a unique credibility, and young people are more receptive to meeting high standards and project deadlines set by people with the same expectations for themselves.”**



boosting engagement. According to Rebecca London, senior researcher at the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at Stanford University, “Meaningful engagement is important, meaning the kids are really learning something. ... You have to hire staff who are experts in what you want the kids to learn about to ensure it’s a skill-building opportunity for the young people.”

### **Teaching Artist Staff is Empowered, Engaged and Well Compensated**

For artists to form meaningful bonds with youth, they need to remain long enough with organizations to develop those relationships. That means programs have to find ways to encourage the retention of effective teaching artists. While turnover remains a major challenge in youth-serving groups (Noam, 2008; et al.), many best-practice organizations defy that trend by keeping staff for years at a time. In interviews with key opinion leaders on OST and the arts and in case study interviews, three key factors emerged as contributing to high levels of retention: 1) empowering artist instructors to do their own program development, 2) engaging them in organizational management and 3) providing compensation that acknowledges expertise and includes benefits.

At SAY Sí, the team of teaching artists meets weekly with Artistic and Executive Director Jon Hinojosa to discuss big-picture organizational issues as well as the status of individual students. The meetings are a productive mix of peer sup-

## PLAYWORKS' MODEL APPROACH TO STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Playworks, a national group devoted to inclusive play and recess to support social and emotional learning, provides a best-in-class model of commitment to staff development.

Playworks' coaches, who are responsible for direct program delivery to youth, participate in two weeks of intensive training prior to the start of each school year. First-year coaches receive afterschool training three afternoons per week for the first three weeks of school and for the rest of the year participate in a minimum of monthly, two-hour in-service sessions.

Coaches can easily access individual support. Program managers support clusters of eight schools, do weekly site visits and talk with coaches several times a week. Many program directors assign each new coach a mentor, a best practice that may become formalized for broad adoption. All coaches are encouraged to exercise Playworks' open-door policy and to participate in the culture, which welcomes questions at all levels.

All team meetings include professional development with long- and short-term learning goals and best-practice sharing. An online filing cabinet provides 24/7 access to advice and best practices from peers throughout the United States.

Playworks' approach to professional development in many ways resembles positive youth development itself, with autonomy, skill building, and mentoring components.

port, practical program management, idea sharing and reflection. The organization also devotes two solid weeks during an annual retreat with teaching artists to visioning and planning work; they make decisions about everything from facility design and use to program offerings. Teaching artists receive what they consider to be good salaries and benefits. Recognizing that quality studio space is in short supply, leadership's policy of encouraging staff's use of SAY Sí's studio space and equipment has proven beneficial to staff job satisfaction and retention. Like many of the organizations studied, SAY Sí enjoys longevity in its staff, with tenures of more than five years being the norm, and in some cases 10 years or more.

Similarly, at Fleisher Art Memorial artist instructors take part in a range of activities affecting the larger organization, from planning and implementing community outreach to re-writing job descriptions. In addition, they're compensated at a competitive hourly rate, and Fleisher pays for instruction time as well as for a designated amount of set up and clean up, acknowledging that teaching artists spend time on those essential program-related tasks.

### **The Importance of Professional Development and Peer Support**

Best-practice youth-development arts organizations provide a considerable amount of staff support, particularly ongoing professional development and peer mentoring. Peer mentorship provides an effective, low-cost approach to supporting teaching artists in what can be challenging work. Fellow staff members who are engaged in leading OST arts programs serve as a sounding board when problems or questions arise, offering practical advice and encouragement.

New Urban Arts (NUA) in Providence, for example, values peer mentorship and offers new teaching artists coaching from their seasoned peers. The coaches provide practical advice, information resources and emotional support. NUA's annual three-day leadership institute helps artist mentors, as all the organization's teaching artists are called, advance their expertise. The group emphasizes that its culture values learning and therefore supports experimentation, qualities that hold great appeal for the creative individuals who work with young people there.

Similarly, SAY Sí emphasizes ongoing learning as a staff. Colleagues share germane youth development and arts research with one another for discussion at staff meetings. The organization regularly invests in professional development by funding staff participation at relevant conferences. SAY Sí also keeps top of mind that its instructors are artists. All staff retreats involve experiencing art together, for example visiting a museum exhibition as a team. The group then discusses the shared experience, providing intellectual and creative engagement and a vibrant and arts-rich staff culture.

OST arts programs require practicing, professional artists who want to work with youth in order for the programs to be high quality and engaging to youth. For this principle to be successful, organizations must not only hire professionals, they also must treat them as professionals. Through engagement in the overall organization, empowerment in managing their programs and good compensation with benefits, teaching artists are more likely to stay with organizations. With peer support and professional development, they can become an essential component of successful youth engagement in meaningful OST arts programs.

PRINCIPLE  
NO. 2

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS HAVE A PUBLIC COMMITMENT TO HIGH-QUALITY ARTS PROGRAMS THAT IS SUPPORTED BY SUSTAINED ACTION.**

In organizations of all stripes, the chief executive officer (CEO) or executive director (ED) sets the tone for what is valued and emphasized. And support staff tends to fall in line with those priorities. That's as true for arts or multi-disciplinary youth-serving organizations as anywhere else. One common thread we found for best-practice youth-development arts organizations is that leaders were outspoken advocates for the arts. These executive directors do more than merely include OST arts programs in the mix. They actively take steps to help them thrive. Such support has a bottom-line result, as well, ensuring that top leadership will protect arts programs from severe budget cuts or outright elimination.

In centers with thriving OST arts programs, EDs play a central role in ensuring these efforts function as an integral component of a complete youth and community offering. To that end, they include the arts program director or equivalent in senior management meetings, giving that individual an important seat at the table and the chance to influence and gain insight into the workings of the organization, as well as enabling the staff to form relationships with senior leadership.

What is the source of such motivation and commitment? Often, executive directors have had someone in their lives – a parent, sibling or friend – who was an artist, and from that relationship they have developed an appreciation of the



*Poet James Kass is also the executive director of Youth Speaks, a spoken word and multimedia youth organization in San Francisco. Photo by Daniel Schaefer. Courtesy of Youth Speaks.*



**“These executive directors do more than merely include OST arts programs in the mix. They actively take steps to help them thrive.”**



arts. In other instances, EDs are artists themselves. Whatever the source for this emphatic backing, it also facilitates several other success principles, such as the hiring of practicing, professional artists (#1) and the provision of dedicated, inspirational space (#3).

Such public advocacy comes with some risk. Certain stakeholder groups may be skeptical of the benefits of arts programs, especially in the context of other policy or social priorities in low-income communities, such as improving academic performance or reducing substance abuse rates. Offering support, therefore, may require EDs to be willing to stick their necks out for arts programming, and they must be willing to face the consequences if their efforts fail.



*The Heart of Los Angeles website prominently showcases the organization's arts programs alongside its sports and academic offerings.*

## **Leadership That Values Arts Programs Allocates and Sustains Resources Accordingly**

At the multifaceted Latin American Youth Center in Washington, D.C. (LAYC-DC), which provides social services, educational enhancement and other programs, the arts play an essential part in the institution's holistic approach to personal wellness for youth and young adult participants. The arts permeate all of LAYC-DC's facilities, from tile mosaic backslashes at the drinking fountains to colorful murals, and show they are a core part of the organization's identity.

Staff credits longtime LAYC-DC Executive Director Lori Kaplan, an arts lover, for the importance that arts programs play at the center. Even in periods of lean budgets, for example, Kaplan has continued to fund these programs. And in 2004 Kaplan allocated a building that the organization had acquired previously to become the LAYC-DC Art + Media House, a dedicated space for arts and media programming. Such support also sets the tone for the entire organization, ensuring that the arts are recognized as an important part of the mix of programs and services.

Similarly, because of Olis Simmons' appreciation for Arts & Expressions, the program offered by Youth UpRising, the Oakland-based organization of which she is president and CEO, she has taken active steps to support the group's arts curricula. She raises funds on behalf of arts programming, advocates for the allocation of sufficient resources, embraces the arts component of Youth UpRising's organizational identity and takes an interest in the youth participants, getting to know them and their work.

## **Executive Support for Teaching Artists Increases Their Satisfaction and Retention**

As we've seen, OST arts programs of excellence often enjoy long staff tenures that defy the norms for retention among youth-serving organizations. One reason cited by artist mentors for their low turnover is that they feel valued by the organizations' directors.

Jon Hinojosa, artistic and executive director at SAY Sí, is an artist himself and has a firsthand understanding of being a mentor in OST arts programs, as well as an understanding of the artistic process. Hinojosa brings that strong appreciation for the work of teaching artists to his leadership agenda. For example, because he recognizes that working artists have a range of needs encompassing more than just wages and salaries, Hinojosa offers his teaching staff use of space, materials and equipment. He also creates a sense of community, encouraging staff in their artistic pursuits and taking time to

## HOW TO TURN CEOs INTO ARTS PROGRAM ADVOCATES

What can arts program leaders and staff do when they have an executive director or CEO who isn't yet an arts champion?

Twelve YMCA arts program directors and managers convened at the Y-USA Expo in 2012 to discuss their shared interests and successes. Of utmost importance to the long-term success of programs, they said, was winning CEO buy-in and support. Some CEOs were on board from day one, while others took longer to embrace the programs. But in all cases, CEO support was vital.

The group recommended these strategies to win senior leadership's buy-in:

- Craft early wins for your program to help create momentum.
- Discuss the positive difference arts programs make in the attitudes and lives of individual youth and encourage CEOs to observe programs for themselves.
- Create avenues for youth to attest to how important arts programs are to them.
- Encourage the CEO and other leadership to attend culminating events, such as poetry slams or art exhibitions, so they see the quality of work and the pride among youth.
- Secure funding. Demonstrating the ability to tap resources to support OST arts programs will help establish the credibility of programs.
- Uncover any arts interests or hobbies among staff members to identify potential supporters who can help win CEO buy-in.
- Reach out to new CEOs when there is a change in leadership to gauge their interest and support and highlight arts program successes to build this critical relationship.

talk to them about their own projects as well as their work at SAY Sí. What's more, Hinojosa values his teaching artists' and program directors' perspectives on the organization overall, and he involves them in management discussions on a range of issues and decisions, from fund-raising to program diversification and expansion.

Such efforts do not go unnoticed by the staff, which appreciates his efforts. Not only is turnover low, but staff cited Hinojosa's empathy and artist credentials as essential to their job satisfaction.

An ED doesn't need to be an artist in order to foster a feeling among staff of being valued. "I'm not an artist myself, but I champion this program," commented Frank Kenneally, vice president of operations at the Merrimack Valley YMCA in Massachusetts. "After seeing the impact of the Music & Youth program on our kids, I've become a huge advocate. We work hard to make sure this program is successful and is properly funded. We also make the commitment to a full-time Music Clubhouse director, and that person is considered part of the management team."

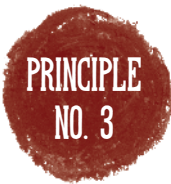
### **Leaders Ensure That Arts Are a Visible Part of Organizational Identity**

Executive directors with a strong, public arts commitment ensure that arts are visible in prominent places. The message

they send is clear: The organization values the arts on an equal footing with sports or other programs.

In the four buildings where the youth-development organization Heart of Los Angeles (HOLA) is located, paintings and other artwork are everywhere, displayed throughout the lobbies, program spaces, libraries and offices. This public commitment to arts on an equal footing with other programs also is evident on the organization's web site – another forum through which EDs convey their priorities. Web designers routinely create information architecture around a messaging hierarchy: If, for example, sports activities are in the main navigation bar and arts programs are three clicks down, it reflects a decision that athletics are more important. But organizations such as HOLA prominently feature arts on their main navigation bars. While equal prominence on a web site may not provide a complete reflection of the quality of the underlying programs or of resource allocation, it does suggest organizational priorities and the CEO's ultimate agenda.

The bottom line: When CEO or executive director support is strong and public, not only do arts programs receive adequate attention and resources, both staff and youth get the message that what they are doing is valued – and the organization will continue to support and invest in their efforts.



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**ARTS PROGRAMS TAKE PLACE IN DEDICATED, INSPIRING, WELCOMING SPACES AND AFFIRM THE VALUE OF ART AND ARTISTS.**

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*Spy Hop's main lobby sets the tone for the space within: creative, high tech, open. Photo courtesy of Spy Hop.*

In a gritty section of Oakland is Youth Radio, a media arts center for teens and young adults. The moment you step through the doors, you can see young people producing media – some solo, many in duos or small groups – on professional-grade equipment. You see a wall of journalism awards earned by Youth Radio participants for their work. And you feel a palpable energy.

Lissa Soep, research director of Youth Radio and co-author of *Drop that Knowledge: Youth Radio Stories*, said: “When kids come to Youth Radio, they know they are entering an arts-centered space, they are walking into a top-flight

media center, and it is a space of aspiration. That is all highly engaging.”

Spaces matter. While arts programs have practical needs – ranging from floors appropriate for dance to storage for supplies – spaces matter for symbolic and emotional reasons as well. When organizations dedicate specific physical areas to their arts programs, they signal to youth that those classes are valued and worthy of participation. And they set the tone for an affirming environment steeped in creativity, productivity and achievement.



Dedicated arts program spaces can provide powerful sources of inspiration for youth. Young people are energized when they see accomplished work produced by their peers, read quotes about the arts posted on the walls and observe others engaged in creative activity. Adam Sherlock, radio documentary instructor at Spy Hop, said: “I’ve seen how kids here respond to this professional space and to the posters of other young people’s projects and to the energy of this dedicated space. ... The young people who come here are inspired to see other people their age or just a little older than them doing quality work and doing big projects, and they are motivated by knowing that this place is for them.” Our research pointed to three key factors in using space to drive the culture and creative energy of OST arts programs. First, that young people feel the space is theirs and it reflects their visions and values. Second, that the place is immersive, positive and affirming. Third, that it is functional and dedicated to one or more art forms.

### **Creating a ‘Third Place’ and a Distinctive World Immersed in Art**

Dedicated program spaces give tweens and teens a place to call their own. Such spaces can function as a “third place,” as described by urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg – providing a social gathering location separate from home and work (or school, in the case of tweens and teens). To help Fleisher Art Memorial’s fledgling teen program take off, Director of Programs Magda Martinez advocated for a separate space that not only would be used exclusively for the teen program, but also would be a place on which high school students could put their stamp with décor and artwork. Fleisher converted a former gallery space into the Teen Lounge, and program participants chose the wall color and furniture; they also display their artwork there. As a result, the teens feel a strong sense of ownership over the space, according to Martinez, and that has helped to strengthen a sense of connection to the program.

But these spaces do more than merely establish a third place for teens. They also create a distinctive world in which students are immersed in art, a home that provides both a sense of belonging and the excitement of being part of a creative environment.

In 2006, SAY Sí purchased a former industrial building in the Blue Star/Southtown arts district in San Antonio, which it then renovated, animating its new home with art. The archway above the main entrance carries the message, “Wings to Fly,” an affirming greeting (taken from a quote by Frida Kahlo, “Feet, what do I need you for when I have wings to fly?”) for each person crossing the threshold. Quotes about

arts and artists from John F. Kennedy, Leo Tolstoy, Maya Angelou and Isaac Stern, among others, adorn windows and doors throughout the building.

Almost everywhere youth participants and visitors look at SAY Sí, they see people engaged in creative endeavors and artwork from past and current students. Guillermina Zabala, media arts director, said, “This space has given the students a feeling like this is their home ... and an amazing space for them to explore art.”



**“Spaces matter. While arts programs have practical needs – ranging from floors appropriate for dance to storage for supplies – spaces matter for symbolic and emotional reasons as well.”**



### **Size Is Important, but Spaces Don’t Have to Be Deluxe**

Ultimately, however, the size of spaces matters, too. David Bickel, program manager at Music & Youth Initiative, is clear about the importance of having not only dedicated space but also a location with a sufficient amount of square footage. The Music & Youth Initiative, which has successfully grown to 11 sites throughout Massachusetts (including a number of locations at YMCAs, where the program originated; Boys & Girls Clubs; and other community organizations), has specific space requirements for affiliation with the program. Depending on which of the Music & Youth Initiative’s three program models an organization is implementing, either 1,000, 650 or 350 square feet of dedicated space is required. Through experience, the Music & Youth Initiative came to pinpoint the minimum physical space needed to accommodate the program’s musical

## WHIMSICAL SPACES PART OF FORMULA FOR SUCCESS AT 826 CREATIVE WRITING CENTERS

Imagine a store where an old-time pirate might shop and where pirate-themed products and humorous signs abound. Inspiration flourishes in 826 Valencia's fanciful Pirate Supply Store in San Francisco's Mission District. The store is one of eight sites in the 826 network of creative writing and tutoring centers throughout the United States.

With pro bono design support, a project budget, and a healthy dose of imagination, the front part of the facility has been transformed into an intriguing, wondrous environment. Youth participating in writing workshops or drop-in tutoring move through this wonderland to the private, rear portion of the building devoted to 826 Valencia's programs, where the pirate theme continues in an intentionally warm ambience. The space is inviting, whimsical, and full of student projects such as published anthologies. It is a place where young people like to spend time.

The Pirate Supply Store began as an effort to comply with zoning regulations requiring a retail storefront. However, 826 came to realize that quirky spaces help attract youth and volunteers and set the stage for creativity, so the organization made imagination-sparking store fronts a signature of its program sites – from the Brooklyn Superhero Supply Company at 826NYC to The Boring Store in Chicago. As a bonus, the stores generate profits that support programming.



*The 826 Valencia Pirate Supply Store offers everything a pirate could need, from eye patches to captain's logs. The youth program area is entered via a gangway. Photo courtesy of 826 National.*

instruments, sound and recording equipment and performances, and now deems them to be so central to the success of the programs that they are non-negotiable.

Meeting space requirements for a given art form is ideal. At the same time, however, a location doesn't have to be costly or deluxe. Many of the case study organizations started in humble environs. SAY Sí fondly remembers its origins in a more modest and less comfortable space, complete with leaky air conditioner, which held the same commitment and sense of purpose as the organization's new building.

### Sharing Space Suboptimal

Before moving into its dedicated arts building, according to Marie Moll, Art + Media House director for the Latin American Youth Center in Washington, D.C. (LAYC-DC), the organization tried operating arts programs out of a basement used for its



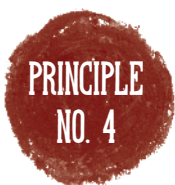
*Fleisher Art Memorial created its Teen Lounge out of a onetime gallery. Photo courtesy of Fleisher Art Memorial Writing with Light Teen Lounge workshop.*

teen drop-in center. “It was challenging because there were a lot of distractions. There was loud music from the weight room or youth playing pool that sometimes was at odds with the atmosphere sought by youth coming to create art. There was often a gender divide [boys lifting weights and girls participating in arts programs],” she said. Moll stated that programs have flourished in the cozy, old house that LAYC-DC acquired and allocated to the arts.

Not every organization has an area that can be dedicated solely for use by arts programs, however. In those cases, shared space is better than no space at all. To make shared spaces work well

for OST arts programs, they should meet the physical needs of the particular art form or program and feature visible art that enlivens the space for their varied users. Organizations also have to take steps – for example, allocating adequate storage space – to prevent breakage or theft of projects.

Ultimately, dedicated arts program spaces are ideal because they meet not only the physical needs of the programs but also provide validation and inspiration for youth participants. David Bickel of the Music & Youth Initiative echoed other youth arts leaders in observing, “Youth want a place to call their own.”



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## THERE IS A CULTURE OF HIGH EXPECTATIONS, RESPECT FOR CREATIVE EXPRESSION AND AN AFFIRMATION OF YOUTH PARTICIPANTS AS ARTISTS.

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For participants in exemplary organizations, showing up is not enough. Strong arts programs inspire young people to produce creative work that often goes beyond what they ever imagined they could accomplish. Consistently communicating that participants are expected to do their best is a cornerstone of such achievements. Through modeled behavior, messages from program instructors and peer leaders, clear rules and affirming messaging about the value of their creative expression and their abilities, youth come to a firm understanding: They are expected to attend sessions regularly, be engaged, work hard and demonstrate respect for themselves and others. By encouraging young people to achieve a high level of performance, programs foster a greater sense of commitment among participants.

But programs convey another similarly affirming and exhilarating message to youth: They are artists – and what they have to say to the world through their creative expression is valuable.

Setting high standards is important for all young people. That may be particularly true, however, for low-income youth who may experience diminished expectations for their performance by their teachers in school. As documented by Lenore Jacobson and Robert Rosenthal in their landmark study of the Pygmalion Effect (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968, 2003), people will rise to high expectations placed upon them, just as their performance will fall in response to low expectations. Karena Salmond, program director for Performing Arts Workshop, an organization that partners with community groups and schools throughout the San Francisco Bay Area,

said, “What’s really important is to keep the bar high. We demand that our artists have high standards with youth.”

### **Striving for Personal Excellence and Promoting Positive Values**

The youth arts organizations we studied effectively demonstrate to young people that they can achieve high levels of artistic accomplishment. In doing so, they expand a young person’s sense of possibilities. That’s as true for highly motivated tweens and teens as those with lower levels of engagement. And even youth who are less motivated may raise their standards for their own performance when they see what their peers have accomplished. Through increased exposure to and critical discussion about art, as well as a focus on skill building, a young person’s expectations for himself or herself may evolve and grow.

Still, the self-publishing trend has lowered the bar; programs face a new set of challenges due to the proliferation of amateur videos on YouTube and elsewhere on the Web. Many tweens and teens have become accustomed to video projects with low production values. What’s more, because of the ease with which young people can create and post work online, tweens and teens may arrive at a program thinking they don’t have much to learn because they’ve been there, done that. Spy Hop program instructor Adam Sherlock reflected, “These kids are watching YouTube videos being uploaded by their peers that to us as adults are terrifying to see. The sound quality is horrible, and the camera’s shaking around like *Blair Witch* the whole time. ... But kids love it. And

that's what they grew up on. We encourage them to take that next step, saying, 'You're not done yet; there's so much more that needs to go into this to get it to that level.'"

What's an effective way to set expectations for quality work? To establish high standards, Spy Hop, like many youth arts programs, shows young people high-caliber projects produced by their peers. Sherlock continued, "When these kids enter into PitchNic [Spy Hop's yearlong film program], one of the very first things they do is go to the previous year's film premiere. They see that it's on this massive screen and there are all these people there. And the work is on a really, really high-quality level. And they realize, 'Oh man. We gotta really make a good movie here. We can't just mess around for an hour with a camera and call it good.' Showing them we're going to take the work that seriously allows them to realize that as well."

Best-practice OST arts programs also convey their high expectations through formally stated values and codes of conduct. The tenets are presented in contracts between

participants, programs and sometimes parents or caregivers – as well as in handbooks, on wall posters and verbally. Such declarations of values are taken seriously and often reiterated by artist mentors during studio time. Like many groups involved in positive youth development, these organizations also recognize that promoting positive values not only makes programs run more smoothly, it also provides lessons that will serve young people well in other aspects of their lives.

The National Dance Institute of New Mexico's (NDI-NM) Core 4 principles are simple and straightforward: "Work hard," "Do your best," "Never give up" and "Be healthy." The principles form a mantra among participants and instructors, who frequently remind youth of the Core 4 with additional reinforcement from colorful signage in the hallways and dance studios.

In fact, "Do your best" is a hallmark of many best-practice youth-development arts organizations that we observed. We often heard teaching artists telling youth when they



*A young writer at 826 displays a newspaper she helped produce. Photo courtesy of 826 National.*

thought they could do better or a project wasn't complete. While one reason for such candor is encouraging youth to stretch to a higher level of accomplishment, an important by-product for instructors is gaining credibility with young people, who too often have experienced hollow praise for mediocre work.

In the process of encouraging kids to do their best, however, NDI-NM insists that the organization doesn't go to the dark side of setting high expectations – berating a participant, for example, or pushing dancers to exhaustion. Instead, it has established a positive culture that emphasizes joyful learning. The blend of fun and high performance levels was evident one Saturday morning while middle school students took part in a street jazz dance session. The student dancers were engaged in a fast-paced exercise with new combinations of moves. It was challenging for everyone, including the instructors, but they didn't give up. As the dancers went through the exercise repeatedly, improving each time, their expressions revealed a mix of concentration and elation.

Many dancers rehearsing that day likely experienced *flow*, the positive psychological state of optimal experience identified and described by psychologist and researcher Mihály Csikszentmihályi and noted in Chapter 1. Among the components of flow is challenging oneself within the upper range of one's ability. Good instructors are able to gauge when an activity will hit the sweet spot of being neither too easy nor too difficult, as NDI-NM's artist mentors did that Saturday morning. The students were highly engaged as they stretched their skill level but were not pushed beyond their abilities to the point of frustration. These carefully calibrated expectations contributed to NDI's ability to motivate 69 middle school youth, including more than 20 tween boys, to keep coming back every weekend from September through May and persist in three-hour rehearsal sessions.

### **Clear Rules and Earning a Spot in the Studio**

In addition to setting high expectations, many organizations we studied have rules for attendance and minimum school grade point averages. Such systems support a better experience for participants and staff.

RiverzEdge Arts Project in Woonsocket, R. I., which serves young people ages 14 to 24, has found that a formal approach to setting expectation works well with participants. It has a weekly requirement for minimum participation hours with a clear process for absences and ongoing attendance issues. RiverzEdge Executive Director Bekah Speck advocates for

clearly communicating processes and expectations to youth to help reduce conflict: "We have a high expectation model, but very clear, simple, easily enforced rules. . . . If a young person has an issue it is with the rules, not with the staff."

RiverzEdge also has a social contract, which helps create a positive, respectful culture. All participants read and sign the



**“An additional factor encouraging strong attendance and performance is the sense that participants have earned their spot in a desirable program.”**



contract, which was developed with youth input and which establishes such positive social norms as: "We treat everyone with respect," "We trust each other by being trustful" and "We are open-minded and value humor and fun."

An additional factor encouraging strong attendance and performance is the sense that participants have earned their spot in a desirable program. By establishing up-front requirements that involve some sacrifice and hard work on the part of youth, organizations create the conditions for success. When youth have to work to enroll in a program and know they've gained access to an opportunity that others would jump at the chance to get, they are more likely to value their participation – and their commitment has greater staying power. Speck of RiverzEdge said one of the most effective tools in getting young people to recommit and change poor attendance patterns is reminding them of the long waiting list to get in and that they are in danger of losing their place, which will be taken quickly by someone who wants very much to participate.

RiverzEdge moves down its waiting list in order, accepting anyone who submits an application, completes a tour, and has a "C" or greater grade point average. It is once young people join the program that they must complete what is



*Many organizations that are intentional about calling their young participants “artists” require them to develop and display or present artist statements. Photo courtesy of SAY Sí.*

their most challenging requirement: 72 hours of unpaid work in the studio. During this nine-week period, students effectively self-select who will meet the program’s eight-hours-a-week commitment and other expectations. There is a strong incentive for putting in that time – the opportunity to join the ranks of the organization’s paid apprentices, who must remain on the path to high school graduation and apply to college in order to retain their positions.

The rigorous process of joining SAY Sí – which continually has a waiting list – speaks volumes to prospective participants about the organization’s high standards. The path to enrollment involves a formal interview and portfolio review. Because this is the first interview of their lives for most students, SAY Sí ensures the experience is friendly and supportive yet serious.

Students who complete SAY Sí’s application requirements and are accepted experience a feeling of accomplishment for having navigated a demanding process successfully. They

have earned their place. As at RiverzEdge, the organization uses the program’s popularity to its advantage, occasionally reminding students that it is a privilege to be at SAY Sí, and there is a long waiting list of young people who would be willing to fulfill the requirements for participation.

### **Social Enterprise Programs Set Professional Standards**

Social enterprises produce goods or services that generate revenue used to address societal issues. Social enterprise arts programs provide young people with experience in entrepreneurial and business skills, training not widely available to youth in low-income communities (Hirsch, 2005). The RiverzEdge approach, modeled after Boston’s Artists for Humanity organization, engages in professional contracts for such services as graphic design work, and it pays stipends to youth participants, also referred to as apprentices.

Apprentices consider their involvement at RiverzEdge to be

their job. As such, the organization expects a high level of professionalism. They must arrive on time and be engaged fully in activities during program hours – basics for paid employment. Apprentices also must demonstrate a commitment to quality and on-time product delivery, whether they are working on a screen-printing order or a custom architectural model. Because much of the work takes place in groups, the young people also learn about teamwork, compromise and accountability.

In addition to experiencing pride and purpose in generating revenue for RiverzEdge through work, there is another attraction for apprentices: A stipend may enable young people in the high-poverty community where the organization is located to continue their participation, rather than being forced to take a menial job. Shirley Brice Heath, a linguistic anthropologist who has spent more than 30 years studying afterschool programs, said: “In the really underprivileged, poor communities, kids will be drawn, if they don’t have to work, to contribute to the income for the families. And that is the big difficulty, and it’s one of the reasons that so many of the most effective [afterschool] programs pay in one way or the other the young people who take part in those programs. They’re paid with art supplies, or they’re paid with sets of tickets for performances that relate to the arts; they’re paid with bus transit, or they’re paid in some cases with actual salaries where they’re producing art.”

While social enterprise is a smaller aspect of SAY Sí’s programmatic approach than RiverzEdge’s, participants do engage in some contract work. The more typical way that young people generate revenue is through artwork sales at frequent student exhibitions. The twist at SAY Sí is that a student receives 50 percent of the revenue generated, while 20 percent goes to support the organization and 30 percent is put into the student’s college fund. The assumption built into this formula is that SAY Sí participants will go on to college, and for the past nine years, 100 percent of them have. To get access to this money, students must produce a matriculation letter at the institution of higher learning they will attend. With five to six shows a year and participation for many students stretching out over six years, a young person’s college fund can exceed \$1,000.

SAY Sí’s organizational budget includes a line item for acquiring student work for the permanent collection, which is on display in the building. It is an immense source of pride for young people to have SAY Sí purchase their work, and an honor many would not have envisioned prior to their involvement in the organization.

There is another way for students at SAY Sí to earn money – one that requires meeting expectations for model behavior such as arriving on time and being fully engaged. High school students at SAY Sí can interview for the opportunity to be a mentor to middle school youth, a role for which they are paid. Guillermina Zabala explained, “Mentors’ responsibilities are very important and we actually hire them. And from what we hear from the mentees and what we see in how the mentees perform here, we are able to see whether or not the mentors are doing a good job.”

## Seeing Youth as Practicing Artists

The best-practice youth-development arts organizations we studied operate with a core philosophy that everyone can be creative. And they intentionally communicate this belief to young people in the hope youth internalize that message. What is more, they understand the power of language to reinforce young people’s burgeoning self-image as serious creative beings: For youth to believe they are artists, in other words, programs need to refer to them as artists. For that reason, artist mentors deliberately describe participants as *filmmakers*, *dancers* and the like. The approach also helps young people learn to embrace the creative process itself. Fleisher teaching artists, who view demystifying the creative process as part of their role, for example, make



*An important part of Principle #4 is engaging young artists in the opportunity to create original works in the young artist’s medium or media of choice. Photo courtesy of SAY Sí.*

such affirmative statements to youth as, “I believe everyone can make art,” and “Draw however you feel comfortable.” Among Fleisher’s three core values is “The Artist in Us All – Within every individual are the ingredients for original artistic expression.”



**“Strong OST arts programs also signal to young people they are artists by having them participate in activities typically performed by professionals, such as creating a portfolio of work or writing an artist’s statement.”**



James Kass, founder and executive director of Youth Speaks, discusses his approach: “When I lead a workshop, the first thing I say on Day One is, ‘I’m going to treat you guys as if you’re professional writers ... so let’s take this work really seriously.’” Kass continued, “We believe that young people know more than they think they know, and we want to get to that. That’s part of our artistic process. We help them get

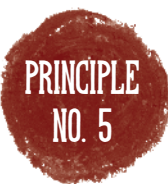
to a totally different place in part by simply saying, ‘What do you mean by what you just said?’ and then asking them to think and go deeper.”

In some cases the belief that everyone is an artist is formalized in documents provided to students. That is the case at RiverzEdge, where the student handbook states, “All youth have creative talent.... With a small amount of guidance and a lot of practice, that talent can be discovered and developed with remarkable results.... The creative talent of youth, when combined with diligence and hard work, has value to the world.”

Strong OST arts programs also signal to young people they are artists by having them participate in activities typically performed by professionals, such as creating a portfolio of work or writing an artist’s statement. Such activities also require that young people use critical thinking, organization and writing skills as they are challenged to present their work as artists.

Best-practice programs provide further value to youth by engaging them in authentic art making rather than craft projects, where students model their work after a prototype shown by the instructor. Through the process of producing something original, such as a new dance, sculpture or digital illustration, they come to realize they can imagine and create something that didn’t previously exist. Significantly, youth acquire a sense of agency, because once they are involved in making a work of art they know they have the power to change things, as well. Young people also identify problems and solutions, an inherent part of the artistic process.

While young people starting in a program may find the high expectations for performance and conduct to be unfamiliar, and perhaps daunting, often they come to embrace and value the culture. In fact, participants frequently become involved in applying the standards themselves.



## **PROGRAMS CULMINATE IN HIGH-QUALITY PUBLIC EVENTS WITH REAL AUDIENCES.**

The exhibitions, performances or other capstone occasions in which young people’s experiences culminate are often the most anticipated components of the best-practice OST arts programs. Such events give youth a specific goal to work toward. A key element is an audience that extends beyond program

participants and staff to include parents and caregivers, friends, peers, community members and even the media (Heath, 1998). Culminating events also provide a chance to take positive risks, fuel the plan-produce-present-reflect cycle of the arts, and validate youths’ efforts through high-production values.





*Culminating events provide young people with the opportunity to showcase their hard work and receive public recognition for their accomplishments. Photo courtesy of the Boys & Girls Clubs of America.*

## **Audiences and Public Recognition Boost Engagement**

Culminating events provide an opportunity for participants to showcase their hard work, an experience many young people crave. According to Gigi Antoni, president and CEO of Big Thought Dallas, tweens and teens consistently rank in surveys the public presentation or recognition of their work as the most important part of their experience. Adelman Hnasko, a researcher and former director of the New Mexico School for the Arts, said, “In that presenting moment, when you take it live, or share it with an audience – who may not know you and may not love you – that is a critical moment, and the young people I work with love that moment.”

Presenting their work to a real audience is especially powerful. Through her research and work at Youth Radio, Lissa Soep also has found that experience to be a particularly important

contributor to youth engagement in arts programs (Soep and Chavez, 2010). Despite young people’s ability to upload their creations to the Web, and in the face of many viral sensations online, for the majority of youth mass Internet audiences for their work do not materialize. The ability to reach a real, substantial audience through an organized event or established online forum is one feature that differentiates OST programs from what youth might experience creating work independently.

Reaching an audience is meaningful to young people because community members, friends and family often look at youth in a new light when they see them in action. A student’s parents may be impressed by what they see, and their praise may be extremely important to a young person – perhaps resulting in a positive shift in family dynamics. Even if parents or caregivers don’t attend, but community members do, young people are likely to find it highly affirming when strangers show inter-

## NDI-NM ELECTRIFIES AUDIENCES AND GIVES EACH YOUTH A MOMENT IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The National Dance Institute of New Mexico (NDI-NM) puts on school shows and community performances before large crowds several times each year. The productions feature professional sound systems and lighting, costumes, live musical accompaniment and high-quality choreography. The shows involve every young person who has participated in NDI-NM's programs that year and feature multiple youth soloists. Additionally, all performers take part in "runs and jumps," where they leap across an illuminated spot at center stage to literally have their moment in the spotlight.

The applause was thunderous at an NDI-NM spring showcase performance for local schools as students in the audience cheered for their peers onstage. When an instructor asked how many young people there wanted to dance with NDI-NM, virtually every one of the 800 young people in the crowd shot up a hand. NDI-NM uses the school performances to inspire interest in its programs, as well as to showcase the talents of its dancers.



*"Runs and jumps" at a National Dance Institute of New Mexico performance give every dancer a moment in the spotlight. Photo courtesy of NDI-NM.*

est in their work. Such affirmation can begin to address some of the barriers to enrollment, especially lack of peer approval for engaging in arts programs, not just for current students but also potential participants in the audience who witness the accolades that youth receive. And there's another benefit, as well: These authentic creative expressions also convey a more positive and nuanced impression of teens and tweens than the usual representations of youth in the mainstream media to which the public is more frequently exposed.

Interaction with the audience can be a vital part of these showcases. Youth Speaks' James Kass highlighted the community-building aspect of the groups' poetry slams when he said, "There are a lot of kids whose friends don't come to the [Youth Speaks writing] workshop because they're not interested in being a writer, but they'll

come to the shows, and they'll come and support their friend who is onstage, and we'll build a community that way. So for us, the ethos of sharing and engaging publicly, that's part of the credible core of the work."

### **High Production Values Reinforce Quality Standards and Validate Youth**

High-quality productions such as those at NDI-NM's performances signal to students their efforts are valued. Youth Speaks holds its local poetry slams and national Brave New Voices gatherings in professional theaters with their accompanying sound and light systems, green rooms and production managers – providing participants the same circumstances that a working writer or performer would experience. First-time slammers and veterans alike feel the thrill of appearing in a professional

facility. It's an experience that would be different fundamentally were the performance to take place in a cafeteria or similar space. James Kass of Youth Speaks explained, "Artistic presentation is really important to Youth Speaks because we don't ever want to be seen as a high school talent show, or just as another arts and crafts program. We want to treat and present these young writers and poets and performers as world-class artists. So we get them into world-class venues, we get world-class audiences and we treat them as though they are as talented and important as artists as anywhere in the world."

### **Positive Risk for Youth Can Lead to Personal Growth**

Youth tend to take a lot of risks, not all of them wise and not all of them resulting in positive personal development. Culminating events in OST arts programs provide an opportunity for young people to take chances of the healthy, positive variety, quite different from the type of harmful experimentation associated with such negative behaviors as

drug use. For most participating youth, the public performance or display of their artwork in a culminating event involves an element of risk because they are publicly exposing products of their creative expression – sometimes of a very personal nature – to the world. But while they're likely to feel vulnerable, they often gain confidence through the experience of the final event. They get the adrenaline-rush thrill of taking a risk, especially in cases in which something potentially could go wrong – say, flubbing a line during a theatrical performance. What's more, such mistakes and the experience of recovering and moving on also have the potential for personal growth.

### **Events Fuel the Artistic Process**

Event deadlines provide the structure youth often need to complete a project. Participants understand their work must be ready to be viewed or they need to be prepared to perform by the exhibition or performance date. Working under such a deadline can motivate youth to produce work they feel proud to share publicly – and to do so on time.



*A youth takes the microphone at Brave New Voices, Youth Speaks' annual national poetry gathering and competition. Photo by Daniel Schaefer. Courtesy of Youth Speaks.*

## A WINDOW ON COMPETITION FROM YOUTH SPEAKS

After three HBO specials, *Brave New Voices*, the 15-year-old annual national poetry gathering and competition started and run by Youth Speaks, is both the most well known aspect of the organization's work, and the most hotly debated. Youth simultaneously love and bemoan *Brave New Voices* and the local poetry slams that act as feeders into it. And staff members have spent countless hours debating, planning, managing, debriefing and refining the competition.

According to James Kass of Youth Speaks, creating a competitive experience was controversial: "In some ways the last thing we want to do is enter more competition in these kids' lives, but we also recognize that competition challenges young people to be their best in the moment and to find their pathway toward that success. It was based loosely on the adult poetry slam, but we modified the rules with more youth-development principles. The poetry slam has been a huge draw. It brings a lot of young people to the table because somebody is crowned a winner at the end of it, and some young people thrive on that." While the poetry slam reflects the competitive nature of the publishing industry to which these young writ-

ers may aspire, it also provides all participants an opportunity to be heard by performing their work.

Competition also can provide young people with the opportunity to assess the quality of their work compared to that of their peers. And that provides motivation to improve. Kass said: "Some young people will come in with a false sense of where they are [with their work], and... they will see somebody else their own age do something much more complex, much more interesting, and they challenge themselves and say, 'O.K., I'm going to come back next year and I'm going to do better.'"

Ultimately, for many participants the thrill of performing and the community that is forged seem to trump winning, as exciting as it may be. Kass continued, "We downplay the idea of competition and nobody really wins anything at *Brave New Voices* except bragging rights. We emphasize that what's important is the community they're building, that they're supporting each other. ... By the end [of the *Brave New Voices* festival], they don't even usually want us to announce who wins, frankly."

Presenting fuels the artistic process in a fundamental way. Artists move from the pinnacle of presenting back into working on their next piece – reflecting, planning, producing, and presenting again. During the reflection phase of the artistic process, for example, culminating events provide the opportunity for young artists to give and receive critical feedback, and to grow from such comments. Teaching artists know through direct experience how to support youth following a culminating event as their work is critiqued.

Koffi Sessi, a Spy Hop mentor, said, "At the end of the Audio Programs class – and I say this on the first day – we have an outside professional recording engineer come in and sit down one-on-one with the students. Students play a piece they've worked on, recorded and mixed, and the engineer gives them feedback on what they did correctly and what they could do better. Having a professional recording engineer tell you, 'You did well,' is a badge of honor."

Culminating events in OST arts programs are in some ways analogous to game days in sports. But there also are important differences because the arts programs typically are project based, and the event marks a project's point of completion. And while suiting up and competing in a sport in front of

a crowd may foster a sense of vulnerability, the nature of publicly sharing one's personal creative expression most likely makes a young person feel even more exposed. Lastly, while typical sports events are competitions, culminating events in OST arts programs more frequently are not. Of course, some programs have a competitive element – which James Kass of Youth Speaks describes as a double-edged sword, providing youth with a constructive challenge but also added pressure.

### **Awareness of Audience Informs Work and Raises Media Literacy**

By producing work and knowing their art will be seen by others, youth can develop a heightened conscientiousness about messaging and what they seek to convey through their work. When young people consider their audience, that awareness becomes part of the way they think about their art and teaches them to look beyond themselves when approaching a project.

Additionally, once youth start producing such work as radio feature stories or films, they increase their media literacy, which results in exponential growth in their awareness of their own consumption of media content. Youth grow more conscious of the messages they are receiving,

who sends them, and how they are being presented. As a result, they become less passive and more discerning about how they get and process this information.

Ultimately, culminating events provide focal points for young people's experiences with OST arts programs. They fuel the artistic process by inspiring youth to create high-

quality work for the occasion. The period after a culminating event is a natural point for young people to reflect on their work – and then use what they learned from the experience to inform their artistic practice going forward. What's more, culminating events showcase participants' accomplishments and positively alter perceptions about both individual youth and young people as a whole.

**PRINCIPLE  
NO. 6**

**POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH ADULT MENTORS AND PEERS  
FOSTER A SENSE OF BELONGING AND ACCEPTANCE.**



*Spy Hop artist mentor Adam Sherlock works with young people. Photo by David Newkirk. Courtesy of Spy Hop.*

## THE RIVERZEDGE DAILY SELF-RATING SYSTEM

When the leaders at RiverzEdge, a social enterprise visual arts program in Woonsocket, R.I., learned from participant surveys that more contact with adult mentors was the teens' top-rated need, they increased the ratio of artist mentors to young people.

Among the many ways that RiverzEdge provides support to youth is through a daily self-rating system that is both caring and efficient. Each day when youth participants arrive, they indicate on a 1-to-5 scale how they are doing. Students are aware that a rating below 3 or repeated 3s over multiple days will trigger a RiverzEdge staff member to follow up with them one on one. This way, young people can easily exercise the option to get focused adult support, and artist mentors are able to gauge where to direct their attention.

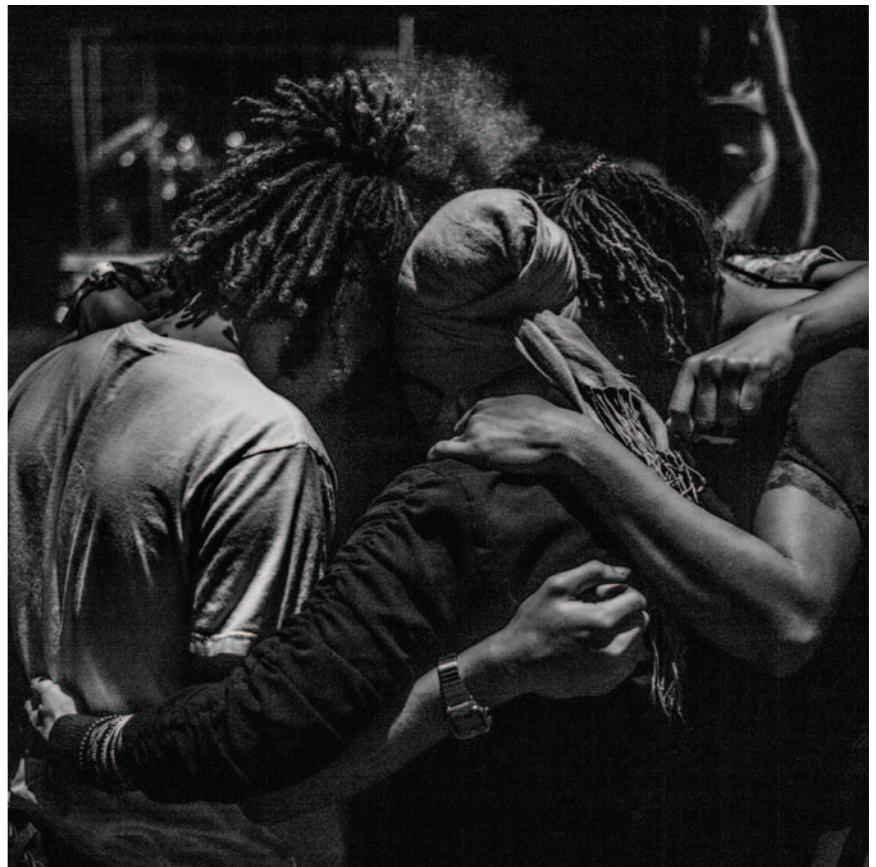
The ratings are publicly posted on the sign-in board and also generate support from other youth. Bekah Speck commented, "Our teens like to be able to be this open here without having to explain themselves.... We maintain this environment as a safe space through clear expectations and ongoing practice, but I would not necessarily recommend this practice for programs with less intensity or continuity. By signaling to others who they work closely with how they are feeling, youth are provided an added layer of control over their environment. I believe teens are naturally empathetic, and we certainly notice their compassionate responses to youth who report numbers in the lower ranges."

Given the vast amount of free how-to videos and creative inspiration available online, why do young people need structured OST programs to advance their artistic pursuits? A major reason is their desire for meaningful, flesh-and-blood relationships – both friendships with other young people and caring bonds with adults.

A myth persists in the culture that tweens and teens only want to spend time with their friends. That simply is not true. Young people need ongoing support from adults, a desire that has been well documented by researchers (Search Institute, 1997, 2007). Throughout our work for this project we heard from program staff and young people themselves about tweens' and teens' yearning for relationships with adults. We also learned how much youth value opportunities

to interact and forge friendships with peers, including those from different schools and geographic areas. Relationships formed in an OST arts program often have a unique dimension because they are based on a mutual interest in the arts, an affinity that may be absent in other school- or neighborhood-based friendships.

A sense of belonging and acceptance is of profound importance to young people (Eccles and Gootman, 2002). Best-practice youth-development arts organizations we investigated recognize the crucial role that rituals, group collaboration and one-to-one connections play in fostering strong relationships among youth, and between artist mentors and young people – and thus, in encouraging a feeling of connection. To that end, they take steps to embrace and address this fundamental need of young people.



*Young poets huddle at Youth Speaks' Brave New Voices competition. Photo by Daniel Schaefer. Courtesy of Youth Speaks.*



*SAY Si staff member and media arts professional Ned Meneses works side by side with a young person in the media arts studio. Photo courtesy of SAY Si.*

### **Mentoring Relationships With Adults Are Multifaceted**

Mentoring forms the focus of the relationships between youth participants and adults in the organizations we researched. It starts with the language that's used. Programs frequently employ such terms to describe teaching staff as *artist mentors* and *poet mentors*, which signal there's a mutually respectful relationship and personal interaction among the adults and young people, as well as skill sharing. They avoid the more impersonal or academic words *instructors* or *teachers*. Jason Yoon, former executive director of New Urban Arts stated, "New Urban Arts is intentional in its language choice by using the term *artist mentors* rather than *teaching artists*. *Artist mentors* signifies the central importance of the reciprocity of the relationship between artists and young people."

In this context, mentors don't dictate to tweens and teens what to do. Rather, they create the framework for projects and invite input, modifying their approach by the age of participants. For tweens, mentors provide more structure and

definition, whereas they solicit a greater degree of self-direction from teens. Artist mentors demonstrate and discuss technique, share experiences, ask youth questions to help them formulate ideas and project plans, and encourage participants, while holding them to high standards. Youth enjoy greater freedom to define projects and to explore possibilities than they typically do in school. Shannalee Otanez, an artist mentor at Spy Hop, said, "We give them [youth participants] the skills, we give them the knowledge, and then from there, they know that they have the opportunity and freedom to figure out how they want to use those skills and knowledge. We let them explore and discover on their own, but we're always in the background, available to them if they need some assistance."

Of course, a central building block of the mentoring relationship is the exchanges between the teaching artist and a tween or teen on a project that is meaningful to the young person. Jason Yoon, formerly of New Urban Arts (NUA) and now director of education at the Queens Museum of Art, emphasized the integrity of interactions between artist mentors and

youth at NUA – and the powerful impact on young people when an adult they look up to treats their opinions with respect. Yoon said, “There is a dignity when an adult whom you admire, whom you look up to, who is an artist you probably want to be like, asks you what you are interested in, what you are trying to make, what are the questions you are asking in your life.”

Adult support of youth takes many forms that go beyond imparting skills and guiding projects, often extending to physiological, social and emotional needs. We heard of mentors helping participants get food and acting as a sounding board to help young people think through how to cope with stressful events in their lives. The act of regularly giving youth positive attention also is an integral part of the mentor’s role.

Such strong relationships do not happen overnight. They often take root and grow organically over time, as young people regularly participate in programs and interact with artist mentors. And engaging programming encourages higher attendance, which in turn fosters relationships due to more frequent program participation and interaction.

### **Youth Form Friendships With Peers Who Share Interests**

As valued as the relationships with adult artist mentors are, the bonds that form between youth participants are perhaps even more cherished by tweens and teens. These bonds are important because they are formed through shared interests

rather than the proximity-based friendships they more commonly experience through their neighborhoods and schools (Ito, 2010). Further, friendships that develop across schools and neighborhoods can feel liberating to young people since they are outside of the elaborate social constructs of individual middle schools and high schools – systems that can be unkind to youth who may self-identify as artists.

Best-practice youth-development arts organizations recognize how important the social aspects of programs are to participants and take steps to nurture friendships among youth. At SAY Sí, middle school youth receive a weekly telephone call from a high school mentor. The high school mentor uses this check-in to remind the middle school participant about the upcoming program session and the projects they will be working on, and as an opportunity for relationship building outside of the classroom. High school mentors also accompany middle school students as they wait for their rides home, using the time to nurture the relationship.

Friendships often start to form when young people share their work – taking the risk of exposing their personal thoughts, feelings or experiences – and it is met with respect and support. Spy Hop artist mentor and former participant Shannalee Otanez understands the power of art to bring together youth who might never otherwise have met or formed a friendship: “There’s something really special when [youth participants] are exposed to hearing each other’s stories. ... At the end of the year ... they’re like a family, where they’re supporting each other.”

### **TAKING YOUTH SERIOUSLY FORMS BONDS AT SPY HOP**

It’s a lot faster to say “no” to young people than to take the time to have a thoughtful, probing conversation with them. In the process of supporting teens and tweens in creative expression, artist mentors at Spy Hop, a Salt Lake City-based youth media arts center, repeatedly engage with participants about their work, signaling that they believe in young people’s abilities to perform at a high level. Perhaps as important, they sometimes push back. This is a potent recipe for forming trusting relationships – and creating strong work.

Spy Hop’s Adam Sherlock described a scenario he has faced many times: “Sometimes kids want to rap about their Cadillac. And you say, ‘I just watched you get off that train and walk in. Why do you wanna lie? Why is that important to you?’

“Once we start to open up that discussion, they start thinking a lot about what it means to be a storyteller. When you say, ‘I’m not gonna say that you can’t do all this stuff, but I’m gonna ask you questions all along the way. And you’re gonna need to justify a lot of this stuff’ ... a lot of these students have never been challenged in that way. Usually, they’re just told, ‘No, you can’t.’ And that’s the end of it. And they [youth] shut down. And I think that most of their interactions with adults are like that.

“So if you open up the conversation and say, ‘Why do you want to do this? What’s powerful about that image? Why is that important to your story?’ there’s a bonding process that comes with that, I think, in a really big way. ... And usually what ends up happening is their art becomes much more interesting.”





Young artists share in the moment at the opening for an exhibition at SAY St. Photo courtesy of SAY St.

### **Collaboration Provides Valuable Experiences and Helps Deepen Relationships**

Friendships form around, and are nurtured by, collaborative projects and work on culminating events. Group projects not only facilitate a sense of belonging they also give young people valuable experience in collaboration. The give and take that occurs, in which individuals do not always get their way and may need to support someone else they are working with, provides important life lessons and the opportunity to deepen relationships.

Koffi Sessi, audio program mentor at Spy Hop, observed that being a recording engineer is as much about the art of collaboration as it is about the music. “The art of the recording engineer is embedded in other recording artists’ vision. . . . Rappers, for example, have very specific demands: ‘I want my voice to sound deep. I want to have some reverb on it.’ And my audio apprentices learn that an important part of their art is to collaborate with others. They understand that although their ideas may not make it into the final piece, their participation still matters to the success of the recording session.”

Linguistic anthropologist and longtime researcher on OST programs Shirley Brice Heath has observed that in the arts, youth get to try out a range of roles – for example, set design, props, acting, directing, singing, operating a camera, editing. That is different from what young people might experience in a sport, where they tend to be channeled into one position – for example, catcher on a baseball team – and then

stay there. One value of trying out a range of functions is it increases the odds of discovering a role that is a great fit. As important, young people acquire varied perspectives by experimenting with different activities, which builds understanding and empathy for others.



**“There is a dignity when an adult whom you admire, whom you look up to, who is an artist you probably want to be like, asks you what you are interested in, what you are trying to make, what are the questions you are asking in your life.”**



## NDI-NM'S ANNUAL GOAL-SETTING UNDERScores THE PREMIUM YOUTH PLACE ON FRIENDSHIP

**N**ational Dance Institute of New Mexico's (NDI-NM) Celebration Team consists of middle school youth who have auditioned and been accepted into the group. The team runs from September through May, and in the beginning of the program participants collectively identify annual goals and return to them regularly and at the end of the year to check progress. These objectives provide a window into what matters to youth in their participation in OST programs – and underscore how important friendships and peer support are to their experience.

2011-2012 NDI-NM Celebration Team goals:

- Work together. Be encouraging and respectful.
- Focus and pay attention. Don't talk too much in rehearsal.
- Learn advanced choreography.
- Work our hardest every day. Give 100 percent in everything we do.
- Feel like a family, be helpful and kind.
- Make new friends, know every member of the team.
- Be healthy, take care of yourself.
- Don't give up, ask for help.
- Be confident in yourself.



*Participants at the National Dance Institute of New Mexico value the friendships they form in the organization's programs. Photo courtesy of NDI-NM.*

Anyone who has seen a cast party understands the power of the bonds formed through shared experience, collaboration and appreciation for the varied roles required to create a finished product. Going the distance together, supporting each other through the highs and lows and sharing in a sense of accomplishment often results in meaningful friendships for youth.

### **Sense of Belonging Is Important to Teens – and Paramount to Tweens**

Opportunities for meaningful inclusion are a basic feature of positive developmental settings for youth (Eccles and Gootman, 2002). As important as belonging is to teens, however, the need to be accepted by peers appears to reach its apex during the tween years. Gil Noam of Harvard has identified that the tension between inclusion and rejection is the predominant theme of

early adolescence (approximately the middle school years). In contrast, later adolescence (11th and 12th grades in high school) is more characterized by identity formation (Noam, 1999). “For the 12-, 13- and 14-year-old kids, the question is more ‘Where do I belong? What am I part of?’” Noam said. “Later teens are about ego, and tweens are about ‘we-go.’”

These differences between tweens and teens have implications for program design. For tweens, especially, program staff must try to create an environment and structure programs so they are conducive to youth forming friendships, collaborating and exploring – say, working together on a video project. Because having a sense of belonging is of such developmental importance to tweens, without it programs run a much higher risk of attrition.

Shirley Brice Heath traces participa-

tion avoidance as a manifestation of an individual achievement culture, where lack of mastery creates self-consciousness. But if the invitation to participate is rooted in being part of a group that is shaping projects, there is greater chance of participation. Heath commented that “the issue for young people today is the group involvement.... When people say, ‘We want you to come and join us in a production, in a long-term project, in a community-building project,’ it’s not about doing art where I get taught and I then have to do what you say. The value is, ‘Come in and join us for the talents, the knowledge, the resources that you can bring.’”

## Rituals Form Unique Cultures and Sense of Belonging

Families, communities, schools, sports teams and organizations of all types commonly use rituals to help define themselves as unique entities. From special lingo to unique ceremonies to well-loved cheers, such customs establish norms,

guide behavior, create bonds and engender a sense of belonging. The best-practice programs use different terms for their various habits and traditions, which range from a special way of saying goodbye to one another to large annual celebrations.

These rituals fulfill purposes beyond creating a sense of belonging and defining the culture. In some cases they provide a way for youth to start a difficult conversation about how they are feeling, or to transition from whatever they were doing prior to their arrival to focusing on the arts program. Other traditions mark rites of passage or are just about having fun.

Supportive relationships between artist mentor staff and young people, as well as among youth, characterize the OST arts programs of excellence we studied. These organizations understand how important such bonds are to participants and view them as instrumental in attracting, retaining and effectively working with young people.

## CUSTOMS WITHIN THE BEST-PRACTICE PROGRAMS

“Youth are social beings, and a lot of their juices are flowing around being with other kids. If you want them to have a sense of belonging, you need rituals,” said Gil Noam of Harvard. The case study organizations have a diverse array of customs and rituals in place that have evolved over time. Below are some examples:

**Opening Meeting** takes place at the start of each day at RiverzEdge. Participants gather in a circle and discuss something good that happened before arriving at the studio. They also engage in **Brain Gym**, which includes coordinated movements meant to awaken both sides of the brain and a stress-reduction exercise – in which participants are asked to visualize a problem they are having or an issue they are concerned about and to imagine freezing it in a block of ice and then melting it. At the closing of their studio time, participants reconvene and describe something positive that happened while they were at RiverzEdge that day. Since youth attend the studio program four times each week, that adds up to eight weekly sharing sessions with peers and adult mentors – and results in a keen sense of connection.

All high school youth involved at SAY Sí attend the weekly **Monday Meeting**, an open space for everyone to check in, get information and build relationships with students in-

volved in separate programs. The highlight is the **Question of the Day**. Staff poses a question, such as, “What are you hopeful about?” and each young person and staff member gets a turn to respond, providing an avenue for sharing, humor, reflection and connection.

SAY Sí’s annual **Hello, Goodbye** ceremony is a beloved tradition that functions as a rite of passage both for graduating and incoming youth participants. Staff members and friends discuss the accomplishments of individual graduates, capping off the seniors’ participation in the organization and providing inspiration for younger tweens and teens. During the gathering, SAY Sí formally welcomes incoming youth and their families to convey how glad the organization is to have their participation. Held potluck style, the event is low cost, yet holds great value for participants.

Young people involved in Youth Speaks enjoy the **Call of the Griot** that marks the start of many of the organization’s public events. According to James Kass, “Griot is based on the West African term for storyteller. We put poets in four different corners of the room, and they perform one group piece, everybody doing 20 seconds, and oftentimes that will start the night. We do that to make sure that space is ours. So, maybe we’re at the San Francisco Opera House, we’re going to transform the space, right away.”

PRINCIPLE  
NO. 7

YOUTH PARTICIPANTS ACTIVELY SHAPE PROGRAMS AND  
ASSUME MEANINGFUL LEADERSHIP ROLES.



*Spy Hop seniors help shape programming at the Salt Lake City digital media arts organization. Photo courtesy of Spy Hop.*

Nearly all youth-development organizations say they are youth-centric. But creating programs for young people is one thing; involving them in the decision making that shapes content and approach is quite another. Embracing youth influence, in fact, may be harder than it sounds for adults accustomed to running the show. The National Guild for Community Arts Education’s *Engaging Adolescents* report discusses youth engagement as ultimately being about power sharing, or “working *with* [youth], as opposed to creating programs *for* them, so they become co-creators of programs that reflect their needs.”

For best-practice arts organizations, developing programs with significant youth input is part of the air they breathe. They regularly seek out young people’s ideas, recommenda-

tions and opinions on project themes, program format and sometimes even the selection of artist mentors. Furthermore, they allow participants to assume peer mentor, youth advisor or other leadership roles, a move that strengthens young people’s commitment, and as a result boosts retention. It also lets them play a valuable part in providing support to program participants and serve as an inspiration to other youth. Tweens and teens need to be needed, and leadership roles can help fulfill that longing (Heath and Smyth, 1999).

**Flexibility Is a Must in Adapting Programs to Youth**

Every group of young people has unique needs and interests that can be unpredictable, and being open and responsive to

those predilections often requires artist mentors and other staff to make adjustments. Firm adherence to a predetermined project plan from start to finish won't work. Youth influence can take place in the beginning stages of shaping a work, or it can occur midstream, with participants suggesting changes in direction or approach as the effort evolves. Such involvement is of critical importance because it can result in peak engagement levels for young people.

Flexibility is so important to Spy Hop's artist mentors they invented a word to describe their philosophy and approach: *Flex-ulum*. Committed to embracing youth involvement, Spy Hop artist mentors strive to be open to changes to their program plans, adopting a pragmatic adroitness that is an inherent part of being open to youth input.

The youth-driven reinvention of Spy Hop Records embodies *Flex-ulum*. Spy Hop Records had been run like an independent record label – students would seek out youth talent, sign artists to contracts and produce their albums as well as book performances for these artists around the Salt Lake area. Youth enthusiastically participated in the program for the first two years, but interest waned significantly during the third year, when 80 percent of the students dropped out of the program. The artist mentor concluded that the program approach was no longer interesting or relevant to the students. He then assembled a team of Spy Hop youth participants to help reinvent Spy Hop Records. The student team asserted that teenagers don't actually buy CDs, nor are they interested in an "old-fashioned" record label model. Together over the course of the year the youth and their artist mentor reinvented Spy Hop Records as a music collective that produces live sessions



*Spokes, the youth advisory group at Youth Speaks, provides input and feedback on many aspects of the organization. Photo courtesy of Youth Speaks.*

each month with local artists. Dubbed "801 SESSIONS" for the area code in which Spy Hop is located, the new program is a success, and most of the student leaders continued into a second and even third year with the program.

### **Youth Leadership and Peer Mentoring: Strategies That Work**

Another hallmark of positive youth development is that young people assume leadership roles involving real responsibility and influence. When such opportunities include

## **HOW YOUTH SPEAKS' 'SPOKES' YOUTH ADVISORY GROUP PROMOTES LEADERSHIP**

**Y**outh leadership opportunities serve both young people and programs, supporting personal development, building skills and meeting the needs of organizations – in particular, the need to be relevant to young people.

Youth Speaks founder and Executive Director James Kass has been deliberate about involving young people in leadership roles since the early days of the organization. The youth advisory group, Spokes, provides extensive opportunities for young people to exert leadership and influence, in addition to supporting personal development and building skills.

In his words: "I knew as a former teacher that to get teenagers involved in a program, [they] had to be involved in the

building of the program. Spokes members are charged with challenging us and making sure that as an organization we're staying true to the youth-development principles and that if there's anything that they think isn't jibing right they've got to let us know. They are also spokespeople for the organization, so they represent the organization in the public sphere from the youth perspective.

"Many Spokes members have moved on to permanent staff positions, either as teaching artists or as administrative staff. We try and give them as many professional skills as possible, and those are office skills and also teaching skills, leadership skills and skills to facilitate public forums."



**“A general guideline among the organizations we studied is that teen programs are *youth led* and tween programs are *youth informed*.”**



problem solving, planning, strategizing and sharing knowledge and skills with other participants, they make a powerful combination: They not only advance youths' personal development but also increase their level of commitment. Programs may select young people based on merit, work ethic and willingness to learn – or because they would benefit from the opportunity to demonstrate positive leadership.

OST experts note that youth leaders are an inspiration to other tweens and teens who come to understand that they, too, can attain a similar position. Youth Radio, for example, offers leadership roles to participants as early as six months into their involvement with the organization. According to Youth Radio's Lissa Soep, young people find it motivating and exciting when they see they have the potential to become a peer educator in a relatively short time.

In an approach reminiscent of junior camp counselor programs, several of the case study organizations use peer mentors as a complement to adult artist mentors. At RiverzEdge, peer mentors receive leadership training and function as surrogate supervisors in the studio, checking in on their mentees every half hour by physically visiting their work areas.

### **Allowing for Age-Appropriate Involvement**

While it's logical that youth will be more invested in programs they have helped design, how much is the right amount of involvement? A general guideline among the organizations we studied is that teen programs are *youth led* and tween programs are *youth informed*. Teens may decide anything from the topics they want to explore and artists they're interested in working with to the types of organizational partnerships to form for a project. Tweens, on the other hand, generally require more definition around

their work and then the freedom to make choices within those parameters.

Fleisher is a study in embracing youth input while adjusting the level of influence based on the age of participants. Teens have a great degree of say in their program experience: They select their projects and artists for residencies from the requests for proposals (RFPs) for artist mentors (with the support of their program leader). The selection process itself is regularly modified based on teen input. For example, based on teens' requests, Fleisher now asks artist mentor applicants to do demonstrations to help the teens get a better sense of potential projects and of the teaching styles of the artists.

For tweens, however, Fleisher provides project concepts and a theme. The theme may be about content such as caring for the environment, or process, such as digital photography. Teaching artists then work with the tweens to help them see a landscape of possibilities for their art.

### **Youth Culture as a Pathway to Engagement**

While artists may have preferences for certain art forms, content or styles, to attract and engage youth, programs need to be guided by market demand – what young people want to do – versus what instructors want to do.

According to David Bickel of the Music & Youth Initiative, using current music and songs that youth participants prefer has been essential to the program's success. He and his colleagues know not to make assumptions about young people's tastes, but to ask them about their interests and to engage them in making selections. Similarly, Fleisher has responded to teen interest in street art by welcoming that aesthetic and by hiring street artists for some residencies. The Fleisher teaching mentors who stay away from the traditional Western canon tend to be the ones teens prefer.

This approach, as applied to the arts, is about trusting youth to steer some content to fit their interests. It also is about being savvy in employing youth culture as a way of conveying respect for young people's interests (Hirsch, 2005). If participants want programs with beat making or sneaker design, many responsive organizations will incorporate such elements. Additionally, some groups design programs that blend youth and street culture with more traditional forms. Of course, the content has to fall within guidelines for age-appropriateness and organizational values.

Programming that is about or relates to the lives of youth also contributes to engagement. Both Youth Speaks and

Youth Radio have found success in content grounded in and responsive to young people's experiences. Youth can use that familiar material as a jumping off point, leading them to make connections from what they already know to new terrain and areas of inquiry.

Humor, a pervasive element of popular culture, is another important ingredient. Sociologist Steven Tepper emphasizes the importance of comedy to youth and advises that arts programs devise ways to let young people have fun with

their work through parody, irony or irreverence. "[That's] what makes it hip and fun for them," said Tepper.

Embracing youth voice and influence to shape and help lead programs, while at times challenging, is essential to engaging and retaining young artists. The rewards are high for not only participants but organizations, as well. In addition to stronger feelings of commitment among young people, programs benefit from meaningful youth contributions they might not otherwise have received.

**PRINCIPLE  
NO. 8**

**PROGRAMS FOCUS ON HANDS-ON SKILL BUILDING USING  
CURRENT EQUIPMENT AND TECHNOLOGY.**



*Access to state-of-the-art technology is one of many draws to SAY Si's media arts studio program. Photo courtesy of SAY Si.*

An essential element for successfully engaging youth in OST arts programs is providing them skills through meaningful, hands-on projects. Several KOLs emphasized that young people are interested in experimenting with materials and technology themselves, instead of hearing or reading about the experiences of others. In the process, youth also want to gain skills. According to Rebecca London of Stanford University, a clear contributor to youth engagement in OST programs is that “youth are really learning something.”

Often that requires incorporating high-quality current technology when feasible. Kasandra VerBruggen, executive director of Spy Hop, a digital media arts program in Salt Lake City, stated, “Young people coming to Spy Hop are very interested in picking up new skills, and for us as a media arts center, central to that is that young people get to use professional-level production equipment. The fact that our equipment is quality and new or relatively new is a huge draw, and it is typically not something the youth can access at home.” Up-to-date technology is especially important in today’s youth culture, in which using current technology is particularly desirable and signals to young people that the organization’s programs are current and that it takes media arts seriously.

According to Robert Halpern of the Erikson Institute, a recognized expert in youth development and afterschool programs, young people prefer programming with more depth, particularly as they get older. And that especially includes skill building and advancement (Halpern, 2004). What’s more, at many programs such hands-on work happens literally from Day One.

At the same time, best-practice programs make sure young people learn a range of soft skills, from collaboration to problem solving. An effective path to acquiring such skills is through project-based learning, the foundation of many of the programs’ approaches.

### Acquiring Soft and Hard Skills

From using animation software to welding to performing hip hop dance, the “hard” skills young people expect to be taught are among the most important drivers for enrollment. According to leading youth-development arts organizations such as Spy Hop and Fleisher, tweens and teens want to know up front what specific expertise they will learn before signing on for a program. As a result, promo-

## PROGRESSION FROM OUTREACH INTO ADVANCED TRAINING




**OUTREACH PROGRAM**  
Partnering with public schools throughout New Mexico, NDI-NM provides dance classes as part of each school’s regular curriculum. A certified NDI-NM instructor and professional pianist teach every class. At the conclusion of each program, students celebrate their successes through a performance or assembly.

**1** Ages: 8-11 years  
Children served: 5,467

**SUPER WONDERFUL ADVANCED TEAM (SWAT)**  
SWAT is a scholarship program that offers a well rounded theoretical and dance experience based on the NDI philosophy and methodology for highly motivated students from the In-School Program.

**2** Ages: 8-11 years  
Children served: 365



**CELEBRATION TEAM**  
Celebration Team is a scholarship program which offers a broad theoretical and dance experience in the NDI philosophy and methodology for the continued study of dance to the most highly motivated and talented SWAT dancers.

**3** Ages: 12-14 years  
Children served: 138




**COMPANY XCEL**  
The purpose of Company Xcel is to give a dance study, rehearsal, and performance experience to NDI-NM’s most advanced dancers with an emphasis on technique and developing personal performance strengths.

**4** Ages: 15-17 years  
Children served: 26




## SCHOOL FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS (SPA) 395 Students

This program provides dynamic, year-round, after-school classes in dance and musical theater technique. SPA provides performing arts classes to any child who wants to study, regardless of his or her ability to pay.




We take Dance for Tots!  
We are 4 years old!



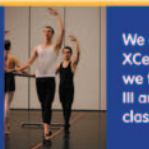
I am 6 years old!  
I take Pre-Ballet Technique.



We take Level I Ballet!  
We are 8 years old.



We are in Level II Tap class!  
We are 12 years old.



We are on the Xcel Track and we take Level III and up classes!

The National Dance Institute of New Mexico illustrates how dancers progress through various classes as their skills improve and commitment to the program deepens. Image courtesy of NDI-NM.



tional material that describes in detail the skills youth will gain, experiences they will have, and technology or equipment they will use generally results in higher enrollment than more generic language. That interest in learning hard skills is another reason it's so important for programs to be led by working artists and designers, professionals who have the expertise needed to help young people gain knowledge and skills.

Russell Baker, executive director at NDI-NM stated, "Building skills gives a young person confidence. It gives them pride. They have dreams, and they're setting goals for themselves, whether they're spoken out loud or not. And so when they're building skills and when they're achieving something that they had this idea that they wanted to do, they're making a dream come true for themselves."

Ladders of progression, with the chance to demonstrate increased levels of mastery within an art form, are another important component of skill building. When programs offer a clear scaffolding of opportunities, young people can see what they might achieve if they continue with a program. NDI-NM, for example, has a poster that shows the progression of involvement from initial to more advanced programming, charting a clear course for students to more advanced NDI-NM dance troupes such as Company Xcel and SWAT (Super Wonderful Advanced Team). Ultimately, more advanced offerings prevent young people from "aging out" of a program by providing a succession of opportunities to build ever-more-advanced skills. Ken Cole, deputy director of the National Guild for Community Arts Education and head of the Guild's Engaging Adolescents Initiative, said, "A real key to quality is sustained programs, where kids can come and participate and grow and develop over time."

The case study organizations we investigated seldom hear young people say they joined a program because they wanted to collaborate or identify multiple possible solutions to a challenge. Yet youth do acquire these so-called "soft skills" along the way through OST arts programs of excellence. Indeed, many skills generally regarded as necessary for success in the 21st century are inherent to the artistic process, ranging from visualizing and decision-making to critical thinking, cross-cultural understanding and creativity.

Whereas feedback in caregiver focus groups generally pointed to low association between arts programs and higher-order benefits, the parents of youth who have participated in best-practice programs overwhelmingly see these associations. A parent of a participant in RiverzEdge said in a 2011 survey that the program "helped my son with self-esteem, confidence, social skills and focusing." Another said

that the program successfully helps participants "develop a sense of responsibility and discipline [and a] sense of independence." Other organizations corroborated this feedback, suggesting that soft skills are recognized after the fact, but are not presumed.



**“[T]he excitement of being hands-on with equipment during the first session can help to erase any uncertainties youth may have about the program.”**



Youth also recognize they have gained such skills when they reflect on and discuss their experiences after completion of a project – and express satisfaction and pride in having done so. Koffi Sessi, artist mentor at Spy Hop, shared his point of view: "The feedback I receive most of the time is, 'I learned to be disciplined.' The students learned to take an idea from inception to fruition. And that for me is hugely gratifying."

Another critical life skill that many of the case study organizations teach is giving and receiving criticism. Often programs include forums in which young people comment on each other's work. Artist mentors coach participants in how to provide thoughtful and positive criticism. Such informal and formal critiques also validate young people's efforts. Through the act of thinking critically about one another's work, youth participants learn they have valuable assessments to make and they need not rely on external judgments as the determinants of quality or effort (Soep and Chavez, 2010).

### **Emphasizing Project-Based Learning**

A cornerstone approach of many of the case study organizations is project-based learning, which involves youth in decision making and investigation, as well as the creation of

a tangible outcome – anything from publishing an anthology of creative writing to producing a film. It’s also a particularly effective forum in which young people can learn important soft skills.

Programs with project-based learning emphasize creative thinking skills and encourage youth to identify multiple ways to solve a problem. Tweens and teens often work in teams, leading to an understanding of collaboration as well as the formation of friendships and building interpersonal skills. Consistent with the artist mentor approach, instructors facilitate and support youth, who help shape projects, rather than dictating or directing how work should be done.

In the process, youth create a product they often are very proud of – and they develop an expanded sense of self. In the case of 826, program directors work hard to enable participants to view themselves as published authors. Ryan Lewis, director of research and evaluation, said, “In the beginning when you hand a student a book and you say, ‘We’re going

to make something like this,’ there’s a lot of dismissal. Then 10 weeks down the line, when they’re actually holding the book, all the disbelief flips into excitement and pride over that work.” The organization emphasizes the young people’s new role as writers by having them create author biographies and giving the now-published young scribes a table full of their books to sign for their fans.

### **Immediate Action, Engaging Pace**

The exemplary case study programs don’t only allow for hands-on work. They also get young people using equipment or dancing, writing or taking photographs almost immediately. For one thing, the excitement of being hands-on with equipment during the first session can help erase any uncertainties youth may have about the program, and it works to hedge against adolescents’ tendency to disengage rapidly. Further, when carefully constructed to include early wins, the approach also serves to build confidence, a sense of efficacy and motivation.



*Young people critique one another’s work at SAY Sí, providing and receiving meaningful feedback and validation for their efforts. Photo courtesy of SAY Sí.*

## FLEISHER PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS SPELL OUT OPPORTUNITIES TO GAIN SKILLS IN ART AND TECHNOLOGY

Fleisher has learned the program descriptions that attract the most participants are the ones that not only convey a sense of fun and adventure but also give youth a clear sense of what to expect. Note in italics below how these Fleisher program descriptions include the following components: skills and techniques, experiences, access to technology or equipment and exploration and adventure.

### DIGITAL STREET PHOTOGRAPHY (AGES 14 TO 18)

Students will *take their cameras to the streets of Philadelphia's colorful Italian Market, the lively South Street area, and the famous Magic Gardens and explore what the "decisive moment" means for them!* Students will *develop their photographic eye, and make images that tell stories while capturing their own point of view.* Students will learn basic *Photoshop Elements® editing and manipulation of images and will finish class with a portfolio of five prints.*

### COMIC BOOKS (AGES 11 TO 13)

Superheroes, pirates, robots, far off places and daring adventure. Anything can happen in the pages of a comic book! In this class, we will *explore the process of making comic books and graphic novels. We will work on character sketching, writ-*

*ing stories and dialogue, laying out pages and of course creating cool cover designs.* Students are encouraged to bring drawings, ideas and examples of their favorite comics to the first class.

### VISUAL JOURNAL (AGES 11 TO 14)

*Capture your observations and experiences in new ways with the visual journal class. Young artists will learn to use a variety of art-making tools such as painting, drawing, collage, as well as text-based elements of creative writing, poetry and typography.* Page by page, we will *develop familiarity with various techniques to construct the composition of a page and to build outward beyond the page with pop-ups, elements that fold out and inserts to hold secrets and surprises.* This class will include some *adventuring around the Queen Village neighborhood.*

Youth Radio, for example, puts young people on the air for a live Web radio show by their second week in the program. Veteran participants cheer on the newcomers, who are buoyed by the obvious confidence the organization has in them. They also almost immediately tackle what might seem to be the most intimidating aspect of the program. Part rite of passage and part engagement strategy, the thrill of doing a broadcast so soon creates excitement and pride about participating in Youth Radio.

Similarly, the National Dance Institute of New Mexico gets young people dancing and moving within the first 10 minutes of the initial program session. As a result, youth quickly see they can learn dance steps and have fun doing so.

While organizations get young people started almost immediately in hands-on learning, to hold interest and provide variety, they also gauge the duration of projects and allow sufficient time for producing meaningful work. Programs, which typically last eight to 12 weeks, often involve completing multiple projects. Fleisher has learned that kids tend to get bored if they're asked to produce a single work during its 10- to 12-week program. Participants now typically complete three projects during that time. As for organizations where young people work on one larger effort, they keep the interest level up by breaking down a project

into discrete elements and showing youth that those individual components are part of something bigger.

Time is one of the advantages of OST arts programs over most school-based classes. OST sessions typically last longer than a class period in school. And that allows participants to make more progress during each program meeting.

### Youth Expect Up-to-Date Technology

Technology pervades the lives of young people today. Best-practice youth-development arts organizations we studied understand the profound importance of that phenomenon for their programs and the need to include current tools, when appropriate. Training on up-to-date equipment has another benefit, as well: It can be a powerful hook for program enrollment, not only because young people are drawn to tactile experiences and technology but also because this hands-on training provides critical vocational exposure and job skills.

While the importance of technology in the lives of young people isn't new, what has shifted is a decline in tweens' and teens' tolerance for anything outdated, and the rate at which technology becomes outdated. Shirley Brice Heath sees current technology as essential for attracting and maintaining young people's interest, which is "different

## PROCESS OR PRODUCT?

It is natural for the high-profile, culminating events (discussed in the section on Principle #5) to capture a lot of attention among young people and program staff alike. Such events and the artistic creations they feature can be considered the artistic *product*, while the activities that take place leading up to them – such as planning, creating, refining – are the artistic *process*. Both are essential parts of young people’s program experience, with discovery and learning taking place in each area. Process is the yin to product’s yang.

Hodari Davis of Youth Speaks said: “Our events are the culmination of a lot of process. So by the time you see the event and you’re clapping for what that young person just did, you’re not necessarily reflecting on the 10 weeks it took them to get to that point. And when people come to the final show they say, ‘That was amazing.’ [It’s] almost like the kid was dropped from Mars with this incredible poem, like somehow it was beamed into them. And you have to remind the audiences that ... all kids are capable of this. It just takes a commitment to process.”

James Kass of Youth Speaks added: “What’s on the stage and what’s on the wall ultimately are much less important than how it is you’re engaging in the process.... We show off the product primarily to inspire more process.”

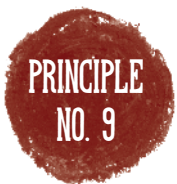


Facilities at SAY Sí include a wood shop. Photo courtesy of SAY Sí.

from the '90s, when they would make do.” Using quality equipment and up-to-date technology is also a way to convey programs’ high standards to young people, as well as how seriously they take digital arts. This is a hallmark of the trailblazing Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild, a Pittsburgh afterschool arts program for urban youth with state-of-the-art tools, as well as many of the case study organizations included in our research.

Youth participants emphatically want to gain new skills in their out-of-school time experiences. And they become

particularly engaged when the work is hands-on and involves the use of current technology. At the same time, best-practice youth-development arts organizations know it’s essential to help young people learn soft skills likely to help youth in both their artistic efforts and today’s world of work. Further, successful arts programs have found that program descriptions detailing the skills youth will gain, experiences they will have and technology or equipment they will use are more attractive to young people and result in stronger enrollment than more vague or generic program names and descriptions.



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## PROGRAMS STRATEGICALLY ENGAGE KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO CREATE A NETWORK OF SUPPORT FOR BOTH YOUTH PARTICIPANTS AND THE PROGRAMS.

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When the young actors and theater technicians involved in SAY Sí's theater group, Teatro ALAS, began planning their 2011 production of *El Corrido de Chuy*, they imagined perhaps 250 people over three nights would attend performances in the black box theater in the organization's building. But thanks to a partnership with San Antonio's 90.1 KRTU jazz radio station, the students' work reached thousands of listeners through several broadcasts of the play.

That collaboration initially focused on KRTU assembling a group of professional musicians to compose an original score for the production and to rehearse and perform with the students. Working with professional artists was an invaluable experience for the youth, who were able to build their skills alongside accomplished musicians. Then the station offered to take the partnership to a whole new level by recording, editing and broadcasting an audio version of the play. Ultimately, that raised awareness of SAY Sí as an organization and gave youth participants the thrill of having their work reach a large audience.

Most youth-development organizations recognize the importance of stakeholder engagement for financial and social sustainability. But many OST arts programs reach out only to parents and other relatives. Best-practice youth-development arts organizations recognize the importance of family engagement, but they also cast a wider net of community supporters, including health care, law enforcement, business, the media and the arts.

By building these connections, these organizations form a network of support, accomplishing multiple goals: providing access to financial and other resources, creating more visibility for young people and opportunities to showcase their work and connecting youth to the larger world – thereby providing a richer program experience.

### **Family Engagement: An Essential Component of Positive Youth Development**

As much as tweens and teens need opportunities for experiences independent of their families, they also benefit from communication across the various segments of their lives, including between their families or caregivers and OST



**“Best-practice youth-development arts organizations recognize the importance of family engagement, but they also cast a wider net of community supporters, including health care, law enforcement, business, the media and the arts.”**



activities (Eccles and Gootman, 2002). But parental engagement cannot be taken for granted. Many relatives and caregivers are stretched thin, often juggling multiple jobs or the responsibilities of being the sole head of household. And they may have had limited arts experiences, resulting in less affinity for or comfort with the arts. As a result, the organizations in our study take steps to ensure family members feel welcome and interested in being involved.

These parent and caregiver connections can take many forms. Orientations held before the first session can increase familiarity with programs and staff; they also help family members understand expectations for participants as well as how to provide appropriate support. Including program content that family members and caregivers can relate to is another way to connect. The National Dance Institute of New Mexico's 2012 Spring Showcase performance included local history to try to increase the connection that relatives – many of whom grew up in the area – would feel to the show and the organization.



*After Fleisber Art Memorial received the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award, Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter joined in the celebration. Photo by Mark Garvin. Courtesy of Fleisber Art Memorial.*

### **Connections With the Broader Community Expand Opportunities for Youth**

Savvy OST arts programs extend beyond families and caregivers in their efforts to build connections in the community, forging ties with everyone from civic and business leaders to local media professionals and influential individuals. The benefits to forming such a network are many, including raising awareness of program and participant accomplishments, garnering cash and in-kind sponsorship, acquiring clients for social enterprise work and engaging caring and civic-minded adults whose presence and interest are beneficial to youth. Further, it is just plain cool for a young person to see a council member or local pastor in an out-of-context setting, to experience these adults attending a youth event and have a reason to interact with

them. For youth, attracting such a broad audience is particularly validating, because they know these busy leaders have made time to attend the program.

Spy Hop's young filmmakers pitch their projects to a panel comprised of board and community members. While the youth gain experience in presenting a potential project and interacting with a range of adults, the panelists also often step in with resources to help make the projects a reality.

Shirley Brice Heath advises organizations to think beyond the usual suspects for community engagement: "It is vital to get word out to folks you don't typically think of as your stakeholders but who are people involved in the welfare and quality of life of the young people in the community: parks and recreation folks, people from the local medical

care facility pediatric and youth units, judges, probation officers, and say, ‘We’d really love to have you come and we need to have your input; we want you to be there to advise us.’ By linking with a broad array of others in the community who are concerned with the well being of young people, programs can grow their reputation and resources. An individual who works on juvenile diversion programs, for example, may hear about a relevant grant opportunity for which the organization could apply, an opportunity the group might not have known about otherwise.

SAY Sí often showcases its students’ films at various community and nonprofit sites, and that engagement has paid off in many ways. A couple of years ago, a local water authority leader in San Antonio saw a film by SAY Sí participants, and impressed with the quality of the work, he commissioned SAY Sí’s media students to create a youth-focused film on water conservation and the aquifer. The project was incorporated into the local public high school science curriculum. Due to the film’s success, the school district requested a second video project, this time a music video, which will be incorporated into the middle school science curriculum. Ultimately, students received a commission from which they learned and grew their film skills, SAY Sí got financial support, the local authority received a quality project, and SAY Sí students’ work is now part of the public school science curriculum.

### **Collaboration With Organizations Is Key**

Driven by a collaborative spirit and desire to expand both experiences for youth and program resources, organizational partnerships are a mainstay of the high-quality OST arts programs we explored. The Art + Media House of the Latin American Youth Center (LAYC-DC) took advantage of its location in Washington, D.C., to forge a relationship with another D.C.-based organization, the National Park Service, in 2010. The resulting program, 2nd Nature, develops young peoples’ creative skills in arts and media while introducing them to environmental issues and resources through visits to national parks in the National Capital Region. The young people create work that reflects what they learned as they researched, observed and asked questions about the environments they explored. Participating youth have a broader sense of the world thanks to the partnership.

Similarly, Blacks in Gaming, a professional association with eight chapters of African-Americans working in game design, is a new partner for Youth UpRising of Oakland. Through the alliance, Youth UpRising highlights African-American professionals in the video game industry, seeking to show tween and teen participants potential career paths.



**“Driven by a collaborative spirit and desire to expand both experiences for youth and program resources, organizational partnerships are a mainstay of the high-quality OST arts programs we explored.”**



### **Raising Visibility Through Stakeholder Ties**

Building community connections also can boost programs’ visibility, not only raising public awareness of their efforts but also providing an imprimatur of quality. Positive media coverage, for example, can lead to more support and attract greater enrollment, as well as creating pride among youth participants.

Business and civic partners can spotlight programs in their communications vehicles, such as e-newsletters. And they can use their physical spaces to showcase youth artwork by, for example, hosting an exhibition in a prominent location. Various connections can provide useful exposure; partners might range from a public library branch to hair salons to hospitals.

### **Project Content and Community Service**

Service-oriented projects put youth in the role of contributing positively to their communities. An added benefit is that, by doing so, youth also are likely to feel positively about themselves and more in control of their lives (McLaughlin, 2000). At RiverzEdge, youth input is solicited prior to project development to engage them in addressing local needs or issues they care about – and in doing so forge connections with their communities. For example, in 2012 teens at RiverzEdge built a large-scale model of the regional Blackstone Valley Watershed for the purpose of environmental planning and education. In the course of the project they learned about

## NEIGHBORHOOD AMBASSADORS BOOST FLEISHER'S COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Fleisher Art Memorial's Community Engagement Initiative represents a major effort to connect with residents of Southeast Philadelphia where the organization is located. A key element of those efforts, the product of substantial research in the community, is the FAMbassadors program. The name of the group uses the acronym for Fleisher Art Memorial, FAM, in a play on the word *ambassador*, to signal the role of these key volunteers and staff members.

The goals of the FAMbassadors program include raising awareness about Fleisher and building trust with target communities that have low familiarity with the organization, as determined by surveys and focus groups. The FAMbassadors' work takes place in community settings and assumes a building block approach, first generating familiarity with Fleisher before promoting specific programs.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The Wallace Foundation sponsored Fleisher's Community Engagement Initiative for three years.

local watershed issues, created a useful tool for the Blackstone Valley Heritage Corridor, and worked with researchers at the University of Rhode Island and other environmental scientists and engineers. The model is being used by a local museum in Woonsocket for educational purposes and by the National Park Service's Woonsocket headquarters. These kinds of projects generate goodwill by building awareness in the community of youth participants' positive contributions.

### Links to Local Arts Community

A number of case study programs are tied firmly to the larger arts communities within their cities or localities. Such connections can enrich programming and help link youth to additional resources and opportunities as they pursue their interests.

SAY Sí models involvement in San Antonio's arts community through regular participation in the local First Fridays art walk and citywide initiatives and events. As a result of these activities, youth participants learn to see themselves as part of the local arts

scene. SAY Sí's well-attended openings are a fixture of the regular gallery circuit, where young people mingle with art lovers, hipsters and other community members and get to see the attendees appreciating their work.

Partnerships with local arts organizations also can provide links to resources that are vital to creating sustainable, ongoing operations – such as experienced teaching artists, suppliers of equipment and materials and performance spaces for culminating events.

Leading OST arts programs take a multifaceted, broad approach in building local connections, and involving parents and caregivers, business and civic organizations, local arts groups, and others. The benefits of such linkages flow in both directions, serving the community while, at the same time, building resources and sustainability for OST arts programs. Particularly meaningful is that extensive community engagement provides youth the opportunity to interact with an expanded universe of caring adults, often leading to experiences likely to open up a broader sense of the world and its possibilities.



*A young artist discusses his work with a community member during an exhibition opening at the RiverzEdge Arts Project. Photo courtesy of RiverzEdge.*



**PRINCIPLE  
NO. 10**

**PROGRAMS PROVIDE A PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY SAFE PLACE FOR YOUTH.**



*The emotionally safe environment at RiverzEdge facilitates sharing among young people. Photo courtesy of RiverzEdge.*

A key tenet of any youth-development program is that it must be safe. Best-practice youth-development arts organizations attend to the need for physical safety and beyond, providing an environment of emotional security as well. In the arts, emotional safety is particularly important, because young people are expressing their thoughts, feelings and experiences, many of which may be deeply personal. These organizations need to be places where youth can express their fears, pain and struggles as well as their joys and aspirations, knowing their self-expression will be met with respect, support and compassion. For that reason, renowned programs and key opinion leaders agree that arts program excellence can only be achieved when there is an environment of physical *and* emotional safety.

Achieving such an emotional safe haven for creative expression, however, is not always easy with this age group. Nonetheless, many youth involved in OST arts programs of excellence say, “This place saved my life,” and more often than not it was because caring adults and peers provided the emotional support necessary for those young people to overcome their personal challenges.

**Artistic Youth Need Places to Feel Comfortable Being Themselves**

All young people need environments where they feel they can be their authentic selves. That is especially important for young people identified as creative, who often exist on the fringe of tween and teen social scenes (Ito, 2010). Highly arts-engaged youth may have a harder time feeling at ease in school, where athletes and more conventional students tend to dominate. Additionally, tweens and teens engaged in multiple types of activities need to know it is safe to share the part of them that is about artistic expression.

Anne Harrison, children and youth program manager at Fleisher, said: “We recognize that middle school youth in particular are trying hard to figure out the social stuff and can feel insecure, so ... we create a safe, creative space where your ideas, who you are and where you come from are validated because making art is like putting yourself out there and it’s hard to do if you don’t feel like you can be yourself.”

Across the best-practice case study organizations we studied, people who work directly with youth consistently empha-

sized that a sense of emotional safety is requisite for creative expression, particularly among tweens and teens. Several case study interviewees noted that authentic artistic output simply will not happen in a group setting where youth are not confident they will receive support and encouragement for their efforts – and will be free from ridicule.



**“[W]e create a safe, creative space where your ideas, who you are and where you come from are validated because making art is like putting yourself out there and it’s hard to do if you don’t feel like you can be yourself.”**



### **Artist Mentors Take Lead on Emotional Safety**

Artist mentors model respect for program participants’ creative expression, and their behavior sets an example for the group. What might begin as a quid pro quo – I will be respectful of your work in part because I know you will be respectful of mine – usually evolves into a deeply held value among youth participants. Respect for self and others – a prerequisite for creating an environment of emotional safety – is often conveyed in participant handbooks and statements of program beliefs. And organizations informally discuss their intention to be emotionally safe places with youth, especially at the onset of a new program.

Helping create a supportive emotional climate for a workshop is at the core of Youth Speaks’ program approach. Hodari Davis reflected, “We’re always meeting the young people where they are. We’re not forcing them to take a leap to some new space. We’re actually starting the safe space exactly where they’re sitting.”

Teen participants at Youth Speaks seem to agree that the program’s artist mentors successfully create a safe environment. Stephanie Yun, a teen participant at Youth Speaks, said: “One of the big differences between me just sitting at home writing and me coming into Youth Speaks workshops is the atmosphere that’s created. It’s really a safe space; you can say whatever you want, whatever you feel. And the greatest thing is all the support that you get there. The poet mentors bring the support; they bring the safe space; they bring the experience; and they bring all that in one package.”

The approach used by one Youth Speaks poet mentor to help a young woman come out of her shell speaks volumes about the empathy and patience that is the hallmark of best-practice organizations. The girl, who was 14 years old at the time, said she barely spoke for much of the first workshop in which she participated. Rather than push her, the poet mentor merely asked if she might share just one word from a poem she had written during a session, and the participant would utter a single word, such as “peace.” Following the facilitator’s lead, no one criticized the girl for her reticence. Eventually, thanks to the support of her peers and artist mentors, she was able to express through her poetry her painful experiences as a survivor of sexual abuse.

This young person said she was not sure whether she would be alive if it were not for her experience with Youth Speaks. She also is extremely proud she has been able to move beyond the subject matter of her abuse to encompass a broad range of content in her poetry, a change she sees as signifying she has started to heal her emotional wounds.

Barton Hirsch noted, after four years of studying six Boys & Girls Clubs, that the qualities making the Clubs feel like home are opportunities for self-expression, along with a range of supportive adults (Hirsch, 2005). Indeed emotional safety is fostered when young people feel they can express themselves freely, so many strong programs provide youth with broad discretion and support to encourage them in their self-expression. This freedom, however, is accompanied by thoughtful guidance from artist mentors, as we’ve seen in Spy Hop’s efforts to engage youth in serious discussion about their work, described in the section on Principle #6.

Gil Noam describes what can happen in an atmosphere where youth feel comfortable participating in programs and expressing themselves creatively: “The chance we have is to understand young people differently, to build their assets and strengths ... to allow them to experiment without being judged.”



# CONCLUSION

**THE NEXUS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS**

**F**rom focus groups with youth and caregivers to case studies of best-practice youth-development arts organizations and interviews with key opinion leaders, we have heard a range of voices and viewpoints and observed an array of practices and approaches. We now have a roadmap of what desirable, quality programs look like, a picture that emerged from the best-practice case studies and KOL interviews and for which the focus group participants independently corroborated findings.

But how can practitioners and others reconcile the overall low demand for OST arts programs among urban, low-income tweens, as revealed in focus groups, with the case study and KOL findings that best-practice youth-development arts organizations often are unable to meet the demand for their programs among that same demographic? How can under-demand and under-supply simultaneously describe the state of the consumer market for OST arts programs targeting low-income, urban tweens?

The findings from our random, moderately arts engaged youth sample do not stand in conflict with the high demand for the organizations in our study. This is borne out in the math; the study of the demand was drawn from a more broadly representative sample. Recall that the focus groups only excluded arts rejecters but included youth of various engagement levels, from low-moderate to highly engaged, and in all forms of participation, from private and unstructured to public and structured. In contrast, most of the best-practice OST arts programs had, by definition, participants who had overcome various barriers to participation, were more highly engaged, were building skills or mastery under artist mentors and with peer critique and were predisposed toward structured programs – or, as we discussed in Chapter 1, mostly “Specialists” and some “Serious Learners” as well. In other words, the cohort of youth served by the best organizations described in Chapter 2 represents a subset – likely a small-percentage one at that – of the youth represented in the focus groups.

Many best-practice programs have waiting lists – suggesting undersupply of quality programs that could potentially serve tens of thousands of young people who are hungry for these

experiences. And if these programs were more widely available – not just at select organizations but in many or all of the communities where low-income youth live – the participation would have the potential to be significantly higher.

As it stands today, we had to wonder why, if best-practice programs are in a state of undersupply, so few youth in our focus groups seemed interested in sustaining participation in arts programs. In addition, how might both grassroots demand and the supply to match it increase? The key to both questions relates to quality. Youth focus group participants spoke often of mediocre or negative experiences they had in past OST arts programs or OST programs overall. We can reasonably link these poor past arts experiences to decreased stated desire for programs today. A universal research theme is that when consumers have a bad experience in any product category, they generally avoid it afterward. This is true for foods, leisure activities and even academic subjects. So if more youth are exposed to quality programs, they would understand through experience that this is, in fact, what they should be like. This conclusion supports the idea that there is latent but not stated demand that could be tapped if the right solutions (programs) were offered. The phenomenon has played out in many consumer categories, from ATMs to Starbucks coffee. And while those analogies may seem inappropriate, the strategic parallels are real; no one was demanding what they apparently wanted until they experienced it.

In this category, what youth in our focus groups said they want – instructor artist credentials, inspiring physical space, social and emotional support elements, hands-on exposure to technology (where applicable), the integration of arts with technology, social media and social enterprise – almost perfectly lines up with the KOL and case study-informed principles. Which suggests, quite simply, that the success principles used in arts programs primarily with highly engaged youth are directly applicable and desired by lesser-engaged youth and may very well move them to the next level.

The implication, therefore, is that improving the quality of programs overall will start to affect more and more youth.

Word of mouth will spread, and over time an increasing number of young people will get involved. As we have seen, there are still many barriers. But some, in particular those related to norms and social permission, can be very fluid. Others, such as resource barriers, while more difficult to address, can be surmounted in many cases. We provided specific suggestions for addressing barriers in the conclusion to Chapter 1 of this paper, which focused on the youth focus group and ethnographic research findings.

There is no substitute for understanding your consumers – what drives them and how to meet their needs. We now have a clearer picture of urban, low-income tweens and teens and their arts-engagement decision-process influences, risks and motivators as well as of best-practice youth-development arts organizations working with this target market.

The path to program excellence is never easy; resources, facilities and effective partners are often in short supply. The study pointed not only to the state of this consumer market and how some organizations are addressing it but also to the need for this problem to be tackled at scale, both to address the supply shortages and increase the demand by bringing more high-quality programs into the market. We are not so naïve as to think that closing the knowledge gap on consumer insights and operational practices is enough. But it is certainly a starting point for organizations interested in crafting programs that meet the needs of their consumers and reflect the proven practices of excellence by some of the country's best suppliers.



# EPILOGUE

**PUTTING PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE  
IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL  
TIME ARTS PROGRAMS**





An artist mentor presents a certificate to a youth participant at RiverzEdge Arts Project. Photo courtesy of RiverzEdge.

In presenting the 10 success principles, we acknowledge that putting them into practice is not an easy or inexpensive path to follow. Our hope is they will serve as inspiration. A program might start with several of the principles in place and an intention to work toward adding other best practices, when possible. Programs will evolve over time and organizations will discover what works best for their communities. The case study organizations spoke often of refining their programs through formal or informal continuous improvement practices.

We were intentional about presenting these as organizing principles rather than as a fully developed prototype with defined approaches for achieving them. Struck by how organizations in different parts of the country, serving different communities in different art forms, arrive at a very similar set of principles that are integral to their strategic plans, operating models or missions, we wanted to emphasize the similarity of the destination but encourage each organization to find a path to get there that works for its culture and stakeholders. For groups looking to develop or upgrade their arts programs, the principles can function as a resource.

Our focus in this project has been on understanding youth preferences and on identifying practices of excellence; we did not specifically study implementation methods. Nevertheless, we culled a number of observations from our site visits and interviews. While this information is anecdotal rather than research-based, readers may find it useful in moving from theory to practice.

To round out our research, we had a series of conversations<sup>16</sup> with organizations that offer the arts as one program area among other offerings, such as academics and sports. These practitioners and KOLs shared what they have found to be effective in introducing and implementing OST arts programs in non-arts-focused community-based organizations.

### **Practicing, Professional Artists as Instructors Are Essential to Engagement**

One foundational principle that should be part of every program is the commitment to putting professional, practicing artists into roles where they are driving the curriculum and

<sup>16</sup> Telephone interviews were conducted with Heart of Los Angeles (HOLA) in Los Angeles; Latin American Youth Center in Washington, D.C.; Youth UpRising in Los Angeles; Boys & Girls Clubs of America national office; and Y-USA.



**“[A]n essential task when introducing arts programs is to build awareness of their value among staff and to create increased comfort or familiarity with the arts.”**



directly mentoring young people. So much of the experience for youth flows from the teaching artist, a point that came across strongly from young people, researchers and practitioners from the case study organizations.

## **Shift in Organizational Culture Required**

There was widespread encouragement for those seeking to introduce arts as a new programming area within youth-serving groups. However, practitioners and KOLs acknowledged that a shift in organizational culture is required for arts programming to be successful. Organizations should strive to imbue their culture with a commitment to the arts at all levels by showing that the arts align with their values. A number of interviewees advised groups that are newly offering arts programs to engage in formal program rollouts, including professional development for all site staff. Gigi Antoni of Big Thought Dallas advised, “Show research that supports the shift. Equip staff with the resources they need. There has to be an institutional conversation with the folks at the ground level.” A number of interviewees discussed providing arts programming as part of a holistic approach to serving youth and to wellness. They took care to state they did not view the arts in competition with other areas such as sports but that all of the programs were parts of a broad offering. “Not everyone is into basketball, and not everyone is into drawing. We’re so lucky that we have these varied offerings. ... We see that different students need diverse approaches to learning and that they are inspired by different things,” observed Nara Hernandez, visual arts director at Heart of Los Angeles.



*High fives – and low fives – are part of Playworks’ culture. Photo courtesy of Playworks.*

## A Heart and Head Approach to Gaining Site Staff Support

This report has focused on tweens and teens as consumers of OST arts programs, but the staff and leadership at youth-serving organizations also constitute a critical market whose support needs to be won. Therefore, an essential task when introducing such programs is to build awareness of their value among staff and to create increased comfort or familiarity with the arts.

Numerous resources grounded in research-based evidence make the case for the value of creative expression and OST arts programs in the lives of young people (Heath, Soep and Roach, 1998; *Arts and Afterschool: A Powerful Combination*, 2005). The research – from top-of-the-line findings and anecdotes to monographs, white papers or books – can be shared strategically with staff that may be unfamiliar with or skeptical about the value of the arts. Readers also can refer to this research project’s videos, posted on The Wallace Foundation web site (<http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledgecenter>), which include footage and testimonials of youth participants as well as practitioners, researchers and administrators with a range of expertise in OST arts programs.

One way to build support and to stem opposition and indifference is to invite staff to see youth engaged in the artistic process and to experience accomplished work by young people. James Kass of Youth Speaks noted, “The best way to get non-arts educators to understand arts education in practice is to actually be a witness to it.” Highlighting positive outcomes in video profiles and inviting youth engaged in programs to talk about their experiences at a staff meeting or retreat also can be high impact ways to demonstrate the benefits of OST arts programs for young people.

By combining the sharing of evidence-based research on the value and impact of OST arts programs with direct arts experiences, organizations can take both an intellectual and emotional approach to building support among broader staff. The importance of executive director or CEO support is detailed, along with recommendations on how to build that support, under Principle #2 in Chapter 2 of this report.

## Roll Out Programs Step by Step and Peer to Peer

Of course, staff will be most likely to embrace new programming when they have been involved in its development. For organizations with multiple sites, numerous



“[C]ollaborations can bring credibility to organizations that lack an established reputation for high-quality arts offerings.”



KOLs recommend that staff take part in the co-creation of programs and that activities be shared on a horizontal or peer-to-peer basis.

Reed Larson, professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and expert in adolescents’ experience in community-based programs, advises organizations to start with a pilot of a new arts program with a smaller group of youth participants. In that way, when the full group comes in some young people will be able to model participation for newcomers.

## Continuous Improvement Is Essential

Effective program development and implementation involve the continuous improvement approach of planning-assessing-improving, as discussed in the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality’s report on its three-year *Youth Program Quality Intervention Study* (Smith et al., 2012). Reed Larson recommends a staggered roll out with a built-in feedback system that gives enough pause points to allow for frequent adjustments to be made.

In conjunction with ongoing reflection and assessment, Gil Noam recommends that organizations have, when possible, professional development approaches at the ready that address various learning styles. PEAR describes these styles as Action, Assertion, Belonging, and Reflection. That will allow the organizations to draw on different ways to address the needs as they are identified.

## Partnerships With Local Arts Organizations Provide Links to Resources

Practitioners, researchers and administrators interviewed for

this project recommended that youth-serving organizations seeking to introduce arts programs consider partnering with community-based arts organizations. Such groups can provide program development and technical expertise as well as access to resources ranging from pools of teaching artists to equipment. Clark Baker, CEO of the YMCA of Greater Houston, described his organization's eight-year partnership with Theatre Under the Stars (TUTS), an alliance that brings arts, music and dance to YMCA of Greater Houston's summer camp participants. "There is no way we could efficiently replicate TUTS' work to the scale they have provided as an arts collaborative partner," Baker said. The partnership is part of TUTS' education and outreach mission. Such collaborations also can bring credibility to organizations that lack an established reputation for high-quality arts offerings.

Partnerships with groups that are plugged into a community's artistic landscape also can help youth-serving organizations tap varied local cultural assets. Traci Slater-Rigaud, director, National Arts and Humanities Youth Arts Program Awards of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, advised: "Partnerships are key in sustainability and engaging a diverse pool of participants and stakeholders."

## Structured Programs Enjoy Benefits Over Drop-In Formats

Some OST arts programs favor a drop-in approach, while others adopt a more structured format. Organizations of excellence tend toward the latter, requiring high levels of participation in terms of hours per week and often duration of participation over time.

KOLs noted that drop-in environments lack continuity. Nicole Yohalem, director of special projects at the Forum for Youth Investment, said, "It is tough to pull off the cycle of making a plan, executing and reflecting unless you have continuity over time."

Shirley Brice Heath recommends having high-level programs with frequent participation and specific roles for youth rather than drop-in centers, except as a safe haven for high-risk, gang-ridden areas with lack of transportation (Heath, 2012). She has found from her research that learning benefits come when participation is greater than 10 hours per week (Heath, 2012). As stated earlier, RiverzEdge and SAY Sí require eight hours of participation each week.



*Young people draw in the light-filled studio at SAY Sí. Photo courtesy of SAY Sí.*



*A young artist paints her self-portrait at SAY Sí. Photo courtesy of SAY Sí.*

David Bickel of the Music & Youth Initiative employs a hybrid model of drop-in open studio combined with structured classes and workshops. According to Bickel, the drop-in open studio helps break the ice and makes it easy for youth to try out the programs, but the classes, workshops, mentoring and performances are essential components for youth to gain and build skills as well as relationships.

While Fleisher's Teen Lounge program is technically drop-in, each semester a core of regular attendees emerges within the changing weekly composition of the larger group. The Teen Lounge's open format allows teens to get involved at any time, but the program is organized on a project basis with artist residencies.

Additional advice on program formats comes from Eugene Roehlkepartain of the Search Institute who advised that the number of participants can make a difference in how comfortable youth feel. Some young people are energized

by large groups, while others thrive within small cohorts of two or three participants. Programs that allow youth to organize themselves in group sizes with which they are most comfortable will be able to help a range of young people feel at ease and connected.

Introducing the arts as a new programming area within an array of OST program offerings requires thoughtful design and implementation. Key opinion leaders and practitioners advise addressing the required cultural shift within the organization; employing a two-pronged approach of building staff support via evidence-based research and emotional appeal via observation and anecdote; and gradual, peer-to-peer program rollout within larger organization structures. While structured programs are preferred as a format over drop-in programs, a number of organizations interviewed for this project employ both formats. Lastly, partnerships with local arts organizations can link programs to useful assets and support excellence and sustainability.

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**APPENDIX**

**ABOUT THE PROJECT PARTNERS**



## **Boys & Girls Clubs of America**

[www.bgca.org](http://www.bgca.org)

For more than 100 years, Boys & Girls Clubs of America has changed and saved lives, enabling young people to achieve great futures. The Boys & Girls Club network throughout America and on U.S. military installations worldwide currently reaches some 4 million children and teens through Club membership and community outreach in nearly 4,000 locations.

## **Fluent Research**

[www.fluentresearch.com](http://www.fluentresearch.com)

Fluent is a public opinion and market research firm specializing in research on children and youth, with a particular focus on research that informs the development of public policy, educational programs and media products and programs for children and youth. The seasoned team of psychologists, social scientists and child experts at Fluent collectively represent decades of experience supporting clients in the development, implementation and assessment of educational initiatives.

## **Next Level SMG**

[www.nextlevelsmg.com](http://www.nextlevelsmg.com)

Next Level SMG is a research-oriented strategy consulting firm that serves both for-profit and mission-based not-for-profit organizations in the areas of branding, marketing strategy and organic growth. Next Level SMG is based in Westchester, NY.

## **The Wallace Foundation**

[www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org)

Based in New York City, The Wallace Foundation is a national philanthropy that seeks to improve education and enrichment for disadvantaged children. The foundation has an unusual approach: funding projects to test innovative ideas for solving important social problems, conducting research to find out what works and what doesn't and to fill key knowledge gaps – and then communicating the results to help others.

## **Y-USA**

[www.ymca.net](http://www.ymca.net)

The Y is an inclusive organization of men, women and children joined together by a shared commitment to nurturing the potential of kids, promoting healthy living and fostering a sense of social responsibility.

**APPENDIX**

**QUALITATIVE CONSUMER RESEARCH  
METHODOLOGY**



**I**n collaboration with The Wallace Foundation, Next Level SMG, the authors of this report, designed a comprehensive and robust field research program that would encompass a multifaceted qualitative approach. This included direct and inferential learning techniques to create a highly informed view of the adolescent’s ecosystem with regard to OST program choices and preferences, including attitudes, behaviors and perceptions specifically with regard to structured OST arts programs.

## The Markets

We were guided by the following criteria in selecting markets for the research:

- Communities with large proportions of inner-city, low-income youth;
- Communities approximating the racial, ethnic and cultural diversity of the low-income, disadvantaged youth population across the United States;
- Geographically dispersed markets to account for regional biases;
- Markets that range in proximity and access to arts programs and cultural institutions; and
- Markets that represent school districts where financial resource challenges have resulted in a dramatic decline in arts programs within schools.

Research was conducted in the following cities and time frames:

- Providence, Rhode Island (February 2012)
- Boston, Massachusetts<sup>17</sup> (February and March 2012)
- Cleveland, Ohio (March 2012)

<sup>17</sup> Boston and Providence were selected as proximate markets for the teen research for expediency in gaining preliminary insights and developing hypotheses to inform the tween research discussion strategy. These markets were not selected with regional diversity in mind.

- Newark, New Jersey (April 2012)
- Birmingham, Alabama (April 2012)
- San Francisco and Oakland, California (May 2012)
- Philadelphia, Pennsylvania<sup>18</sup> (May 2012)

## The Sample

### Teens

Eight focus group discussions comprising a total of 64 highly arts-engaged teenagers (ages 14 to 18) of varied ethnicities were conducted in February and March 2012. These teenagers were affiliated with local YMCAs or Boys & Girls Clubs in Providence and Boston.

Findings from the teen phase of research were used in the development of the research instruments for the tween component of the study – research with youth ages 10 to 13 (“tweens”) and parents and caregivers of children in that same age range.

### Tweens and Parents

From March through May 2012, 151 moderately arts-engaged tweens (ages 10 to 13) and 73 parents of tweens across Cleveland, Newark, Philadelphia, Birmingham and San Francisco/Oakland were engaged in a combination of group discussions and individual interviews.

Moderately arts-engaged tweens were selected as the focus of the research because of the opportunity to create greater impact with this group than with either more highly engaged young people or those who were very minimally interested in arts. For the purposes of the research, “moderately arts-engaged” was defined as interested in one or more art form and currently or in the past having participated in structured or unstructured arts activity. Tweens who expressed that they were minimally or not at all interested in arts, either by virtue of not choosing the arts from a list of activities or by stat-

<sup>18</sup> Newark and Philadelphia are not as regionally dispersed as the other markets selected. Philadelphia was chosen as a fifth city for tween research when show rates in Newark did not provide a sample sufficiently high to represent the Northeast region of the country.

ing outright that they had no interest in any creative pursuit, were excluded. Similarly, tweens who had a clear passion for an art form and who showed considerable dedication to it were also excluded – as the “sweet spot” of engagement we were trying to understand involved low-to-moderately interested young people, so we could understand better how they choose to step up – or curtail – further engagement in arts.

The breadth and complexity of the subject of this investigation called for creative approaches to data collection methods. Practical barriers and triggers to engagement with arts can be comparatively easy for young people to identify and articulate. But deeper (and more critical) emotional and perceptual barriers and triggers are often best teased out in an indirect fashion. We felt it was therefore necessary to engage youth in more than a single format. For this reason, our design integrated multiple avenues of inquiry and methods of data collection.

An extensive, qualitative research project was designed to include focus groups, in-home ethnographic interviews and friendship triads, and a study of photo journal accounts in five urban, economically distressed locales across the United States: Cleveland, Newark, Birmingham, San Francisco/Oakland and Philadelphia.

Specifically, we used the following data collection methods in our study:

- **Focus Group Discussions:** to provide insight from the peer dynamics that typically emerge in a small-group setting.
- **Ethnographic Interviews:** to help complete a 360-degree view of the lives of tweens and explore venues in which arts involvement and creative expression might manifest themselves more clearly, as conducted in the young person’s home.
- **Friendship Triads:** to provide the nuanced insight that emerges from observing the social dynamics of a small group of friends who likely share interests, pursuits and attitudes. These discussions were annexed to the ethnographic work and took place in the host tween’s home, after individual ethnographic interviews were completed.
- **Journals and Photo Diaries:** submitted by all the young people in the study, to detail seven days of daily afterschool activity, along with responses to brief questions aimed at acquiring basic psychographic information to provide behavioral data collected through nonmediated formats.

- **Parent-Child Discussions:** to examine the role of parents as gatekeepers or influencers of tweens’ decisions with respect to arts engagement.

To recruit youth participants and parents, we posted fliers in community centers, near schools and supermarkets, and in houses of worship in communities that met criteria for being urban and low-income. Low-income was defined as a district where more than two-thirds of children receive free or reduced lunch. Would-be participants called a toll-free number for screening, and during the interview we verified that they met criteria for income level (less than 150 percent of poverty level, though most participants were at or below 125 percent of poverty level), age and ability to clearly express their thoughts.<sup>19</sup> We also had a working assumption that arts engagement exists on a continuum from not interested at all (“rejecters”) to highly engaged in arts and programming (“enthusiasts”). The “sweet spot” for the tween sample was young people who exhibited some interest in arts because this is the group whose interest might be sparked by better programming. We excluded rejecters because we felt that they would not be engaged in, and might detract from, a fruitful 90-minute-plus discussion on arts. We did not screen out enthusiasts but did not seek them out either, and they represented a very small percent of the sample. In any case, if they were already heavily engaged in arts programming, at least some of their needs were already being met, and they did not represent the core target audience. Participants were told they would be paid for their time and provided food and drinks during the research.

A summary of the tween and parent groups by market is presented on the opposite page.

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<sup>19</sup> The ability to articulate is a common requirement for focus group or ethnographic participation. It is not a screener on intelligence or grammar, but rather an evaluation to determine if potential participants can express to facilitators what they think and why. Potential participants who are painfully shy, who won’t or can’t share thoughts or express their opinions are usually screened out of qualitative research of this nature.

MARKETS	FOCUS GROUPS WITH TWEENS	ETHNOGRAPHIES WITH TWEENS	FOCUS GROUPS WITH PARENTS	TOTAL
Cleveland, OH	African-American boys, 6th Grade (12) African-American boys, 7th-8th Grade (10) African-American girls, 5th Grade (9) Caucasian girls, 6th Grade (8)	African-American girls, 7th Grade (3) Caucasian boys, 5th Grade (3) African-American girls, 6th grade (3)	African-American (8) Caucasian (9)	4 focus groups with tweens (N=39) 3 ethnographies with tweens (N=9) 2 focus groups with parents (N=17)
Newark, NJ	African-American boys, 5th Grade (5) Hispanic boys, 7th-8th Grade (7) African-American girls, 7th-8th Grade (3)	Hispanic girls, 7th Grade (3) Hispanic boys, 8th Grade (3)	African-American (9) Hispanic (6)	3 focus groups with tweens (N=15) 2 ethnographies with tweens (N=6) 2 focus groups with parents (N=15)
Birmingham, AL	African-American boys, 5th Grade (7) Caucasian boys, 6th Grade (5) African-American girls, 7th-8th Grade (7) Hispanic girls, 5th Grade (8)	Caucasian girls, 8th Grade African-American boys, (3) 7th Grade (3) Hispanic girls, 5th Grade (3)	African-American (8) African-American (6)	4 focus groups with tweens (N=27) 3 ethnographies with tweens (N=9) 2 focus groups with parents (N=14)
Oakland, CA	African-American boys, 7th-8th Grade (6) Mixed ethnicity boys, 5th Grade (6)	African-American boys, 6th grade (3)		2 focus groups with tweens (N=12) 1 ethnography with tweens (N=3)
San Francisco, CA	Asian girls, 6th Grade (5) Hispanic girls, 7th-8th Grade (7)	Asian boys, 8th Grade (3) Caucasian girls, 7th Grade (3)	Mixed ethnicity (6) Hispanic (5)	2 focus groups with tweens (N=12) 2 ethnographies with tweens (N=6) 2 focus groups with parents (N=11)
Philadelphia, PA	Hispanic boys, 6th-7th Grade (6) African-American girls, 6th-7th Grade (7)			2 focus groups with tweens (N=13)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17 Focus Groups (N=117)</b>	<b>11 Ethnographies (N=33 tweens, N=16 parents)</b>	<b>8 Focus Groups (N=57)</b>	

**APPENDIX**

**KEY OPINION LEADER INTERVIEWEES**





**T**wenty-two key opinion leaders were interviewed for the project. Twenty of the interviews were conducted via telephone, and two of the interviews took place in person.

**Gigi Antoni – President and CEO, Big Thought Dallas**

Antoni has built this acclaimed organization serving youth with free afterschool and summer programs in arts across Dallas. Big Thought Dallas has a strong focus on building partnerships to increase access to arts for children.

**David Bickel – Program Manager, Music & Youth Initiative**

As program manager of the Music & Youth Initiative in the greater Boston metropolitan area, Bickel has built a cluster of Music & Youth Clubhouses and related programs, a number of them within YMCAs and Boys & Girls Clubs.

**Ken Cole – Deputy Director, National Guild for Community Arts Education**

Cole initiated and is overseeing the Guild's Engaging Adolescents Initiative. Additionally, he oversees the Guild's program, communications and marketing departments.

**Dr. Michael Cole – Professor of Communications and Psychology, UC San Diego**

Cole has studied individual and organizational change within educational activities specifically designed for the after-school hours.

**Dr. Jessica Davis – Founding Director of the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Arts in Education Program**

Davis was principal investigator, Project Co-Arts, a national study of community arts centers in economically disadvantaged communities that focused on education, 1991-1996.

**Dr. Robert Halpern – Professor and Chair of the Research Council, Erikson Institute**

Halpern is a youth-development researcher at the Erikson Institute in Chicago. His current research focuses on the evaluation of afterschool programs for poor children and their families.

**Dr. Shirley Brice Heath – Researcher; Professor Emerita, Stanford University**

Heath is a linguistic anthropologist and professor emerita at Stanford University. She has conducted longitudinal studies on out-of-school time programming and is the author of the influential monograph *Living the Arts Through Language and Learning: A Report on Community-Based Youth Organizations*; *ArtShow* with Laura Smyth and numerous other publications on the arts and learning in the nonschool hours.

**Adelma Roach Hnasko – Researcher; former Executive Director of the Art Institute at the New Mexico School for the Arts**

Hnasko, a researcher in arts education, previously led a Santa Fe-based charter high school for the arts. She is an anthropologist and M. Ed. who has studied creative activities and interactions of youth, both out of school and in school-based programs. Hnasko co-wrote with Shirley Brice Heath *Imaginative Actuality: Learning in the Arts During the Nonschool Hours*.

**Dr. Reed Larson – Professor in the Department of Human and Community Development at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**

Larson's current primary area of research interest is adolescents' experience in community-based programs, extra-curricular activities, and other structured, voluntary activities in the after-school hours. He is currently president of the Society for Research on Adolescence and editor-in-chief of *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*.

**Dr. Rebecca London – Senior Researcher at the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, Stanford University**

London's research bridges academia and policy, focusing on policies and programs intended to serve low-income or disadvantaged families and youth. London's colleagues at the Gardner Center – Mary Hofstedt, program manager, youth development and engagement; and Nancy Mancini, communications director – also participated in the interview.

**Dr. Gil Noam – Founder and Director, Program in Education, Afterschool & Resiliency (PEAR); Associate Professor at the Harvard Medical School and McLean Hospital**

Noam is a psychologist with strong interest in supporting resilience in youth, especially in educational settings. He is the author of *A New Day for Youth: Creating Sustainable*

Quality in Out-of-School Time, published by The Wallace Foundation.

**Dr. Terry Peterson – Senior Education Fellow, College of Charleston**

Peterson is director of the Afterschool and Community Learning Resource Network and chairman of the Afterschool Alliance. Peterson served as counselor to former Education Secretary Richard Riley. He spearheaded numerous national education initiatives during the Clinton administration, as well as state reforms as education adviser to Riley during his governorship of South Carolina.

**Tia Quinn – Founder and Executive Director, BOOST (Best Out-of-School Time) Collaborative**

Through her work leading BOOST, Quinn supports out-of-school time programs throughout the nation via training, technical assistance, quality assurance and program development. Among Quinn's past roles is program director for Harmonium Children's Services, one of the largest afterschool providers in California, where she oversaw programming at 65 before-school and afterschool programs.

**Nick Rabkin – Senior Research Scientist at the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago**

Rabkin is an arts education researcher and author of *Teaching Artists and the Future of Education*. He has been deputy commissioner of cultural affairs for the City of Chicago, the MacArthur Foundation's senior arts program officer and director of Columbia College's Center for Arts Policy.

**Eugene Roehlkepartain – Acting President and CEO, Search Institute**

Roehlkepartain is a longtime researcher in youth development who was involved in the Search Institute's influential work on developmental assets for youth.

**Karena Salmond – Program Director, Performing Arts Workshop**

Salmond oversees artistic staff teaching in afterschool environments (YMCA's and Boys & Girls Clubs among them), and has conducted workshops at the state and national level about the complexities of teaching art in afterschool programs. Aurora King, program manager, also participated in the call because she manages many of the Performing Arts Workshop's out-of-school time partnerships.

**H. Mark Smith – YouthReach Program Manager, Massachusetts Cultural Council**

Smith manages the YouthReach Initiative, the goal of which is to promote integration of substantive out-of-school arts, humanities and interpretive science opportunities into a col-

laborative community response to the needs of young people – specifically, those at risk of not making a successful transition from adolescence to young adulthood.

**Elisabeth (Lissa) Soep – Research Director, Youth Radio**

Soep is both a researcher and a practitioner who works daily with youth at Youth Radio. She is co-author, with Vivien Chavez, of *Drop that Knowledge*. Soep is a former research assistant to Shirley Brice Heath at Stanford University and Jessica Davis at Harvard University.

**Traci Slater-Rigaud – Director, National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Awards of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities**

Slater-Rigaud administers the awards program that is the United States' highest honor for out-of-school arts and humanities programs. National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Awards were previously known as the Coming Up Taller Awards. Slater-Rigaud is the former program coordinator for arts in education with the National PTA, where she managed the Reflections Program, and she has several years of experience in community-based arts education.

**Steven Tepper – Associate Director of the Curb Center for Art, Enterprise and Public Policy; Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at Vanderbilt University**

Tepper is a leading thinker on cultural engagement and everyday creativity, as well as cultural policy. He is co-editor with Bill Ivey of the book *Engaging Art: The Next Great Transformation of America's Cultural Life*.

**Jason Yoon – Director of Education, Queens Museum of Art; former Executive Director, New Urban Arts**

Yoon is director of education at the Queens Museum of Art. Previously, Yoon served as executive director of Providence-based New Urban Arts, 2008-2012. Prior to that, he served as the director of finance and operations at the DreamYard Project, a Bronx, N.Y., nonprofit provider of arts education programs. He also founded and directed 7ARTS, a youth arts program for teenagers based in the Queens Museum of Art.

**Nicole Yohalem – Director of Special Projects, Forum for Youth Investment**

Forum for Youth Investment is a nonprofit, nonpartisan "action tank" dedicated to helping communities and the nation make sure all young people are Ready by 21®: ready for college, work and life. Yohalem oversees Forum projects on out-of-school time; postsecondary success; and bridging research, policy and practice.



**APPENDIX**

**MASTER KEY OPINION LEADER  
INTERVIEW DISCUSSION GUIDES**



**T**he three discussion guides below—one each for administrators, practitioners, and researchers—represent the master discussion guides for the KOL interviews. Individual discussion guides were tailored to the interviewee’s work and areas of expertise. The live interviews did not strictly adhere to the discussion guides due to the dynamic nature of the conversations and in order to probe interesting lines of discussion and areas of insight.

## Researchers

1. What changes are you observing in teens today in general versus teens 5-10 years ago? What changes are you observing in tweens today in general versus tweens 5-10 years ago?
2. Have you been engaged in research recently that might be relevant to this project? Are there any insights or hypotheses that you are open to sharing?
3. What do you wish you knew (regarding tween/teen OST arts programs or researcher’s specific area of interest) that, if you knew it, would allow you to make a breakthrough?
4. What do you know from your work or see as some of the most useful or insightful research on program design and structure of OST arts programs for disadvantaged youth and/or recruitment and retention tactics? [Not looking here for research in the realm of making the case for such programming being valuable.]
5. What do you know from your work or see as some of the most useful or insightful research on the subject of choice (causal drivers) related to tween participation or non-participation in out of school arts programs?
6. Ask if applicable, based on researcher’s field of expertise and study: Are there any innovations in the field of youth development that might be applicable to this project?
7. We’ve discussed [X, Y, and Z] as being among the insights that have emerged in your work and have been success factors in [OST arts programs, working with adolescents, etc.]. Are there any other insights that have emerged out of your work and the field that hold promise for the evolution of effective OST arts programs for disadvantaged youth and teens and tweens in particular? *[An example of an insight might be that peer critique has proven to be a critical part of the experience in many OST arts programs. Another (this is an example from a practitioner) is the assertion that participation decisions for teens and tweens are made by both parents/caregivers and teens/tweens in combination, and that the parents are typically more outcome focused and the teens/tweens are more focused on the nature of the experience they will have, so effective recruitment and marketing must address both the experience and the outcomes. Beyond widely known elements of effective OST programs for teens and tweens such as the importance of relationships with adult staff, is there other information that is perhaps less widely known? Any fresh insights?]*
8. Understanding what community-based youth organizations can do to increase urban youth access to and engagement with quality OST arts programming is a key priority of our primary research with teens and tweens. Given the opportunity, what would you ask tweens about their participation or non-participation in arts programs? What would you ask teens? What would you ask the parents or caregivers of teens and tweens?
9. What is your thinking on the necessity for culturally responsive programming/pedagogy? Can you point to examples of strong curricula or programming that begin in the culture of the teen and extend to other cultures in an effort to build cross-cultural understanding?
10. What has your research found or what have you seen in others’ work that addresses the use of terms such as “creativity” and “nurturing imagination” as opposed to “arts” and “the arts”? Do you have any advice about using or avoiding the term “the arts” and using or avoiding “creativity” and/or “nurturing imagination”?
11. What kinds of obstacles or issues have you encountered or heard about related to developing and implementing arts programs within youth-serving organizations, and what is your advice for addressing them? [broadly – cultural, funding, infrastructure]
12. Do you have any advice around scalability of OST arts programming and how to retain quality while operating at a national level through networks of social services agencies?

13. What do you view as the best practice organizations serving low-income teens and tweens through OST arts programming?
14. Who else should we be talking with (other researchers, practitioners, administrators, etc.) about this project to get their insights and advice?

## Practitioners

### Trends & Organizational Overview

1. What changes do you observe in teens in general today versus teens 5-10 years ago? What changes do you observe in tweens in general today versus tweens 5-10 years ago?
2. What do you see as some of the most useful or insightful research on program design and structure of out of school arts programs for disadvantaged youth? [Not seeking here research in the realm of making the case for such programming being valuable.]
3. What do you know from your work about effective program design and structure for teen and tween OST arts programming?
4. How would you describe your formula for success?
5. What do you wish you knew regarding tweens/teens that, if you knew it, would allow you to make a breakthrough?

### Programming

6. How do you define quality, and what tradeoffs are deemed acceptable within that definition? E.g. breadth of participation, depth of arts expertise, etc.
7. What have you learned along the way in terms of refining your program offerings and approach that has made them more effective?
8. What is your thinking on the necessity for culturally responsive programming/pedagogy? Can you point to examples of strong curricula or programming that begin in the culture of the teen and extend to other cultures in an effort to build cross-cultural understanding?
9. Is critique part of your programmatic approach, and if so, what does that look like?

10. Is civic engagement an aspect of your programming, and if so, how so and what has this meant to programming?
11. Are public performances or ceremonies, rites of passage, or other milestones/capstones built into your programs? If so, what do they look like and how important do you perceive their role to be?
12. Do youth participating in your programs tend to engage in the forms of art-making they are participating in at your organization also at home, school, or other settings? In other words, are youth also dancing at home, drawing in free time that is outside of your organization, etc.?
13. What community partners are you working with, and how have the partnerships worked or not worked?

### Insights on Audiences /Participants

14. What are some of the most important insights into the youth you serve? What does your organization understand about this target group (low-income teens, tweens) that you feel is unique to your organization? In other words, when you consider low-income teens and tweens, do you see something in them that perhaps no other organization sees?"
15. What drives enrollment in your program(s)? What factors have contributed to retention/ongoing participation in your program? What factors have contributed to loss of participants, and at what age(s) do you tend to see a drop in participation?
16. What types of messaging do you use in promoting participation in your programming, and how is the messaging targeted in terms of toward participants and/or parents and in what percentages, i.e. Participants 70% / Parents 30%? How did you arrive at that ratio and what is it about that split that works for your organization?

### Specific to Wallace Project

17. Do you have any advice around scalability of OST arts programming and how to retain quality while operating at a national level through networks of social services agencies?
18. Understanding what community-based youth organizations can do to increase urban youth access to and engagement with quality OST arts programming is a key priority of our primary research with teens and tweens.

Given the opportunity, what would you ask tweens about their participation or non-participation in arts programs? What would you ask teens? What would you ask the parents or caregivers of teens and tweens?

19. Has your organization/this program been profiled as a case study, and if so, where/by whom?
20. What do you view as other best practice organizations serving low-income teens and tweens through OST arts programming?
21. Who else should we be talking with (other researchers, practitioners, administrators, etc.) about this project to get their insights and advice?

### Administrators

1. What do you view as the best practice organizations serving low-income teens and tweens through out of school time arts programming?
2. What do you know from your work or see as some of the most useful or insightful research on program design and structure for out of school arts programs for disadvantaged youth? [Not looking here for research in the realm of making the case for such programming being valuable.]
3. What do you know from your work or see as some of the most useful or insightful research on the subject of tween participation or non-participation in out of school arts programs?
4. What do you wish you knew (regarding tween/teen OST arts programs or administrator's specific field) that, if you knew it, would allow you to make a breakthrough or would allow the field of OST arts programs for tweens/teens to make a breakthrough?
5. What is your thinking on the necessity for culturally responsive programming/pedagogy? Can you point to examples of strong curricula or programming that begin in the culture of the teen and extend to other cultures in an effort to build cross-cultural understanding?
6. What kinds of obstacles/issues have you encountered or heard about related to developing and implementing arts programs within youth-serving organizations, and what is your advice for addressing them? [broadly – cultural, funding, infrastructure]
7. Do you have any advice around scalability of OST arts programming and how to retain quality while operating at a national level through networks of social services agencies?
8. Are there any innovations in the field of youth development that come to mind that might be applicable to this project?
9. Understanding what community-based youth organizations can do to increase urban youth access to and engagement with quality OST arts programming is a key priority of our primary research with teens and tweens. Given the opportunity, what would you ask tweens about their participation or non-participation in arts programs? What would you ask teens? What would you ask the parents or caregivers of teens and tweens?
10. Have you seen any research or work that addresses the use of terms such as “creativity” and “nurturing imagination” as opposed to “arts” and “the arts”? Do you have any advice about using or avoiding the term “the arts” and using or avoiding “creativity” and/or “nurturing imagination”?
11. We've discussed [X, Y, and Z] as being among the insights that have emerged in your work and have been success factors in [OST arts programs, working with adolescents, etc.]. Are there any other insights that have emerged out of your work and the field that hold promise for the evolution of effective OST arts programs for disadvantaged youth and teens and tweens in particular? *[An example of an insight might be that peer critique has proven to be a critical part of the experience in many OST arts programs. Another (this is an example from a practitioner) is the assertion that participation decisions for teens and tweens are made by both parents/caregivers and teens/tweens in combination, and that the parents are typically more outcome focused and the teens/tweens are more focused on the nature of the experience they will have, so effective recruitment and marketing must address both the experience and the outcomes. Beyond widely known elements of effective OST programs for teens and tweens such as the importance of relationships with adult staff, is there other information that is perhaps less widely known? Any fresh insights?]*
12. Who else should we be talking with (other administrators, researchers, practitioners, etc.) about this project to get their insights and advice?

**APPENDIX**

**CASE STUDY SELECTION PROCESS  
AND ORGANIZATIONS**





## Selection Process

We conducted eight case studies of best-practice youth-development organizations (all but one were community arts organizations) to acquire a deeper understanding and to glean key learning about effective approaches to addressing equity and access to quality OST arts programs.

We began the case study selection process with 48 candidate organizations, all of which met the project's first-level criteria of serving urban, low-income tweens and teens and being recognized for excellence in out-of-school time arts programming, youth development and administration. The initial list of 48 potential case study organizations was developed with input from the literature review; recommendations from the KOL interviewees, The Wallace Foundation and the project partner organizations; and Internet research. We allowed for one or two case studies in nonarts programs if they demonstrated achievements relevant to the project that had not been readily identified within arts programs.

In order to distill from many qualified organizations the ones that would be most useful for the purposes of the project, we then completed a matrix of candidate organizations rated on the additional eight selection criteria listed below. The criteria were drawn from the literature, KOL interviews and the overall learning goals for the project.

*One or more organizations in the overall mix of case study organizations should meet the following criteria:*

- Demonstrated scalability by replicating in multiple cities or states
- Serves multiple program sites within a community or region, demonstrating a cluster
- Partners with Boys & Girls Clubs and/or YMCAs
- Social enterprise/entrepreneurial dimension

*Each criterion should be met by at least one, and preferably two to three, organizations:*

- Involves youth in management/decision making/

program development

- Incorporates peer mentoring approach
- Includes progressive/phased programming models – skill-building/mastery orientation
- Engaged in effective partnerships with community organizations and/or other arts organizations

The matrix analysis generated an intermediate short list of 18 organizations. Additional research, along with several telephone interviews with candidate organizations, helped us determine which might be most informative for the project based on the selection criteria. We sought to include a range of art forms and to have a geographically diverse group of organizations. Additionally, in order to add to the knowledge already present in other literature, we sought organizations that met the criteria but that had not been as widely profiled as some of the better-known organizations of excellence that emerged in our research but were nonetheless widely recognized in the field. That being said, we acknowledge that a number of the organizations that we studied enjoy national and growing reputations for their work.

Lastly, because we wanted to learn about effective, national scaling-up of a program and/or organization through the case studies, and due to limited examples of out-of-school time arts programs that have chosen to scale nationally, we opted to include a non-arts case study in the research – Playworks, an organization that has scaled to successfully run programs in 23 U.S. cities.

## Project Case Study Organizations

**826 National; 826 Valencia – San Francisco, CA; 826 NYC – Brooklyn, NY**

[www.826national.org](http://www.826national.org)

[www.826valencia.org](http://www.826valencia.org)

[www.826nyc.org](http://www.826nyc.org)

826 National is a nonprofit organization that provides strategic leadership, administration and other resources to ensure the success of its network of eight writing and tutoring

centers. 826 centers offer a variety of inventive programs that provide under-resourced students, ages 6 to 18, with opportunities to explore their creativity and improve their writing skills. Core programs include afterschool tutoring, field trips with interactive writings projects, the Young Authors' Publishing Project and workshops on topics such as cartooning and producing 'zines. The organization also aims to help teachers get their classes excited about writing via in-school projects.

826's mission is based on the understanding that great leaps in learning can happen with one-on-one attention, and that strong writing skills are fundamental to future success. In 2011, 826's tutoring centers – located in Ann Arbor, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, Seattle and Washington, D.C. – served more than 29,000 students.

We selected 826 as a case study subject because of its experience and success in scaling its programs to eight cities nationwide while retaining high-quality programming.

### **Fleisher Youth Art Programs, Fleisher Art Memorial – Philadelphia, PA**

[www.fleisher.org](http://www.fleisher.org)

Fleisher Art Memorial is a prominent and thriving community arts center, celebrated as one of the first in the nation. The origins of Fleisher date back to 1898 when industrialist Samuel Fleisher began holding free art classes for lower-income neighborhood boys via what came to be known as the Graphic Sketch Club. Today Fleisher serves more than 5,000 youth and adults annually with tuition-free classes and low-cost workshops, and in public schools and community centers throughout Southeast Philadelphia.

Fleisher's Teen Lounge program was of particular interest for this project.

### **National Dance Institute of New Mexico – Albuquerque and Santa Fe, NM**

[www.ndi-nm.org](http://www.ndi-nm.org)

NDI-NM brings award-winning arts and physical education programs to underserved children in urban, rural and Native American communities throughout New Mexico.

Programs take place after school, on weekends, in the summer, and in school via partnerships with more than 80 schools. Programs serve more than 7,000 youth statewide annually, emphasize joyful learning and support NDI-NM's four core principles: Work hard, do your best, never give up and be healthy.

Drivers in choosing this case study organization included NDI-NM's organizational excellence and the connection it makes between the arts and healthy living.

### **Playworks – San Francisco, CA**

[www.playworks.org](http://www.playworks.org)

Playworks is a national nonprofit organization that supports learning by providing safe, healthy and inclusive play and physical activity to low-income schools at recess and throughout the entire school day. Playworks currently operates its direct service program in more than 300 schools in 23 U.S. cities, and serves more than 130,000 elementary school students every day.

Playworks' approach to scalability, with its strong professional development component and simple core program model, was the focal point of this mini case study.

### **RiverzEdge Arts Project – Woonsocket, RI**

[www.riverzedgearts.org](http://www.riverzedgearts.org)

RiverzEdge defines itself as a social enterprise organization that provides underserved teens hands-on work experience in graphic design, digital photography, screen printing and visual arts.

The social enterprise dimension of the organization was a focal point of the case study.

### **SAY Sí – San Antonio, TX**

[www.saysi.org](http://www.saysi.org)

SAY Sí is a year-round, long-term, nonprofit, multidisciplinary arts program that provides youth opportunities to develop artistic and social skills in preparation for higher educational advancement and professional careers.

SAY Sí's strong history of long-term participation by middle school and high school students and its program of students mentoring students were the focus of exploration in the case study.

### **Spy Hop – Salt Lake City, UT**

[www.spyhop.org](http://www.spyhop.org)

Spy Hop is an acclaimed youth media arts organization that provides approximately 1,800 youth participants per year with hands-on and mentorship-based learning experiences in the documentary arts, film/video production, audio engineering and interactive media. The organization regularly partners with other youth centers throughout Salt Lake City.

SPY • HOP (v): The act in which a dolphin rises above the water in order to navigate and determine its position in relation to other members of the pod. 2.) To look ahead. 3.) To tune in. Spy Hop's artist mentors and its focus on media arts programs were at the center of this case study.

### **Youth Speaks – San Francisco, CA**

[www.youthspeaks.org](http://www.youthspeaks.org)

Founded in 1996 in San Francisco, Youth Speaks is the leading nonprofit presenter of spoken word performance, education and youth development programs in the country. Presenters of local and national youth poetry slams, festivals, reading series and more, Youth Speaks also offers a comprehensive slate of literary arts education programs during the school day, in the afterschool hours, on weekends and in the evenings – while providing numerous opportunities for youth to be published and heard. Youth Speaks works with 45,000 teens per year in the Bay Area, and the organization has helped create partner programs in 47 cities across the United States.

Youth Speaks' programs and its approach to replication were the focus of this mini case study.

**APPENDIX**

**INTERVIEWS WITH MULTIPURPOSE  
YOUTH-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS**



The researchers interviewed staff at three organizations that offer the arts along with other areas of programming, such as academics and athletics, to gain insight into arts programming within the context of a larger organization. The interviewees and their affiliations included:

### **Heart of Los Angeles (HOLA) – Los Angeles, CA**

Abraham Orozco, *Director of Scientific Arts/  
Film & TV Instructor*

Tony Brown, *Executive Director*

Nara Hernandez, *Visual Arts Director*

Christine Witkowski, *YOLA at HOLA & Music Director*

### **Youth UpRising – Oakland, CA**

Rafael Flores, *Director of Arts & Expression*

Luiz Guevara, *Communications Manager  
and Development Specialist*

### **Latin American Youth Center (LAYC-DC) – Washington, D.C.**

Marie Moll, *Art + Media House Director*

### **Questions for Multi Purpose Youth Serving Organizations:**

1. How did arts come to be an offering at your organization?

Is your organization known primarily for arts or for something else? What part of your organization's overall reputation do the arts constitute?

What is the stature or standing of arts programming within the overall organization? How are your arts programs viewed by staff, youth, and your board?

What percentage of youth participants are participating in arts programs? What portion of the budget is devoted to arts programs?

2. What role does your organization's Executive Director

play with respect to arts programming and promotion? Has this changed over time?

3. Did your ED start out as a champion for arts programming? If not, how have you gained his/her support? When did you know that support was real? What advice would you have to others starting arts programs within youth serving organizations in terms of making their ED a public advocate for arts programming?

4. Please describe the challenges and opportunities related to being an arts program within the context of a youth development organization offering multiple areas of programming, such as sports?

5. What have you observed or learned about crossover or lack of crossover among youth participants in the arts and other program areas?

6. Do you have dedicated arts program space(s)? How do you make the space where your programs take place feel like an arts space? What, if any elements are in place throughout your organization's facility that validate or affirm the importance of artists and art?

7. How have you addressed issues around arts program participants feeling comfortable choosing to participate in the arts in lieu of or in addition to other program areas?

8. What advice to you have for introducing arts programs within youth serving organizations that are not known for arts programs and that have more of a programmatic and cultural emphasis on athletics?

9. We got a lot of great insights from best practice arts organizations, but some of them seemed enabled by their singular focus on arts. We are trying to better understand whether more diversified organizations subscribe to similar or different principles for program design. Can you please briefly share your perspectives on the degree of importance to the success of your program of the following:

A. Instructors are professional, practicing artists, and

are valued with compensation for their expertise and investment in their professional development.

- B. Executive Directors have a public commitment to high-quality arts programs that is supported by sustained action.
- C. Arts programs take place in dedicated, inspiring, welcoming spaces that convey the programs' high ambition and affirm the value of art and artists.
- D. A culture of high expectations for participants' engagement, effort, and respect for creative expression is established and maintained. Youth participants are affirmed as artists.
- E. Programs culminate with high-profile, well-designed, public events with real deadlines and audiences.

10. Is there anything else that you wish that we had asked you? Do you have any final comments or advice?





*Working in teams of three student filmmakers—a director, producer and cinematographer—participants in Spy Hop's media arts program learn first-hand how to create professional-caliber films. Photo by David Newkirk. Courtesy of Spy Hop.*

The Wallace Foundation is a national philanthropy that seeks to improve education and enrichment for disadvantaged children. The foundation has an unusual approach: funding projects to test innovative ideas for solving important public problems, conducting research to find out what works and what doesn't and to fill key knowledge gaps – and then communicating the results to help others.

Wallace has five major initiatives under way:

- School leadership: Strengthening education leadership to improve student achievement.
- Afterschool: Helping selected cities make good afterschool programs available to many more children.
- Audience development for the arts: Making the arts a part of many more people's lives by working with arts organizations to broaden, deepen and diversify audiences.
- Arts education: Expanding arts learning opportunities for children and teens.
- Summer and expanded learning: better understanding the impact of high-quality summer learning programs on disadvantaged children, and enriching and expanding the school day in ways that benefit students.

Find out more at [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org).

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