

MODULE A

AUDIENCE RESEARCH MADE EASY



Using Audience Research

EXAMPLE — Audience feedback, South Australia

South Australia is home to a number of small and medium performing arts organisations. One organisation that focuses on multicultural audiences has identified regular audience research as an essential component of their activities. It has a direct influence on the programs they develop and the way they promote their productions. The organisation uses a number of formal and informal research techniques, including forums, focus groups, workshops, e-newsletters, online bulletin boards and online discussions.

EXAMPLE — Youth audiences, Tasmania

In 1999-2000, two Tasmanian arts organisations initiated the Tasmanian Youth Audience Development Strategy, which involved detailed research of live performance attendance by 15–26 year olds. The results of the research indicated that joint audience development projects would be beneficial, especially if they included 'socialisation' offerings. A new concept, LIVE, was developed by six participating arts organisations around the theme *You can't beat a LIVE performance*. It included a website, membership discounts and the establishment of the LIVE lounge for pre and post performance social activities, including live music and other entertainment.

We are just a small organisation. Audience research sounds complicated and expensive.

Any organisation can conduct effective audience research. While it would be nice to have a huge budget to employ professional consultants to prepare impressive reports, there are many practical things that small organisations can do to provide useful information for decision-making.

It takes time to think about audience research, analyse your situation and determine what types of research you can afford to do, bearing in mind the time available, the skills that you, your staff or volunteers have, and your budget.

There are many types of research to consider, either alone or in partnership with others. Useful research may be as simple as having the person who sells tickets ask everyone how they heard about a performance, or where they live; or you may conduct surveys, run discussion groups, or simply watch and keep track of what your audiences do. For example, do they arrive early, walk around the foyer, make food and beverage purchases, or arrive just in time to be seated? These simple types of audience research can assist you in future planning and don't require a lot of time or money.

So, what's the bottom line? Why do I need audience research?

Effective audience research can help you to:

- **Identify opportunities** – for example, how to attract a specific target audience (such as school groups or tourists) or develop membership or volunteer programs.
- **Overcome obstacles** – for example, misconceptions about your organisation, performance times, difficulties booking tickets, lack of knowledge about a performance, venue or location.
- **Improve facilities** – feedback from audiences and staff can help you make decisions that will improve facilities.
- **Improve profitability** – audience research can help you plan seasons and increase the effectiveness of advertising and promotions.
- **Improve efficiency** – audience research can help to identify periods of peak demand and improve staff and volunteer scheduling.
- **Understand your audiences** – the more you know about them, the more you can meet their needs and turn them into regular attenders or subscribers. Who are they? How old are they? Where do they live? What is their occupation? How much do they earn? What other things do they like to do?
- **Improve audience numbers** – audience research can help increase audience numbers by helping to identify potential partnership and cross-promotion opportunities.
- **Provide information to staff, government bodies or boards** – audience research can be a useful, impartial way of presenting information to staff, funding authorities or boards of management about services, facilities or future plans.
- **Validate spending or seek funding** – audience research results can assist you when seeking approval for spending on capital works, advertising or promotions, or for additional staff. Research can effectively support applications for funding and sponsorship.

Defining the marketing problem and the research question

Defining the marketing problem is an important step because we need to fully understand the problem. It is generally a good idea to spend quite a bit of time on this and to discuss it with others.

For example, the underlying reason for declining ticket sales might be the company's policy of giving out large quantities of complimentary tickets. While this is effective in attracting new audiences, potential attenders may have developed a 'let's wait and see if we get free tickets before we pay for any' attitude that has resulted in lower sales and later bookings.

On the other hand, the problem could be that the organisation has changed its repertoire and existing audiences are confused about the programs so they don't go, or wait until they have heard good reports from others before booking.

Consider all the things that may have changed and everything that could be having an impact. For an organisation looking at attendances this could include:

Logistics

- performance times and season
- venue comfort and accessibility
- ease of buying tickets
- ticket price

Promotion and reputation

- choice of advertising media
- quality, content and frequency of editorial coverage
- language and imagery used in promotions
- effectiveness of promotions in reaching target audience
- company reputation
- word of mouth

Product

- subject matter
- performance quality or style
- performers and creative team

Past experience

- lack of satisfaction with the company or with similar kinds of performances in the past

External factors

- lack of time
- family commitments
- other priorities

Developing the research proposition

The final stage of organising your audience research is determining the type of research required to obtain the desired information. There are many types of research options, so the more clearly you define the problem, the easier it is to select the most effective research format.

The steps in developing the research proposition are:

1. Identify the problem.
2. Identify the potential causes of the problem.
3. Consider alternative actions that could solve the problem.
4. Identify existing information that can help solve the problem.
5. Identify what additional information you need to gather.
6. Consider any issues or constraints that impact on what you can and can't do or can and can't change.
7. Decide how you will use the research results to solve the problem.

EXAMPLE — Developing the research proposition: Bendigo Heritage and Arts Group, Victoria

1. Identify the problem.

The Bendigo Heritage and Arts Group initiated an audience development project to increase visitation to Bendigo's heritage, arts and cultural attractions by people from the surrounding Central Victorian region.

2. Identify the potential causes of the problem.

Previous research had shown high levels of awareness of facilities that didn't necessarily translate into visitation. While surrounding communities saw Bendigo as a key service centre, they did not make full use of the cultural facilities available.

3. Consider alternative actions that could solve the problem.

A range of options was considered, including advertising campaigns, free tickets, various options for 'sampling' arts products, and incentive programs of various types. The final decision was to develop an incentive 'invitation', which entitled people to discounts and free admissions but required them to complete a basic questionnaire. Those who took up the offer were later sent a more detailed survey.

4. Identify existing information that can help solve the problem.

Many of Bendigo's heritage, arts and cultural attractions had collected information about their audiences, and the special 'invitation' offers were based on this knowledge. The group used existing electoral roles to obtain names and addresses for a mailout to more than 20,000 regional residents.

5. Identify what additional information you need to gather.

The survey attached to the 'invitation' gathered information on respondents' frequency of visitation to Bendigo, when and why they visited, and whether or not they had attended any of the attractions previously. Information was also gathered on the number of 'invitations' redeemed and the venues visited. The supplementary questionnaire surveyed satisfaction with the venue and intention to revisit.

MODULE A

Conduct a review of the records your organisation holds. Often there is useful data ready and waiting to be used. For example, box office sales records may give you some of the following information:

Existing information	What it tells you
Advance ticket sales	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– the best time to advertise– when it is time to 'panic'
Sales by price category (for example, concession, student, full etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– who your customers are– when your customer mix changes
Addresses of subscribers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– where your audience lives (which can help you decide how to spend your advertising dollars)– where untapped audiences live

There is a lot of research conducted by other organisations that is publicly available. Secondary research is almost always cheaper to obtain and often more comprehensive than an arts organisation could afford to undertake on its own.

Useful secondary data can come from sources like the Australian Bureau of Statistics <www.abs.gov.au>, which collects general information through the census, as well as specific studies on such things as the number of people employed in the arts and the patterns of household spending on arts and entertainment activities.

Local councils have information on the age and ethnicity of people living in the community and many have conducted research on such things as leisure activities, interests and attitudes of young people, and the needs of older residents.

Search the Internet, especially arts-related websites such as <fuel4arts.com>, or contact local council arts officers, the research department at your State arts authority or the Australia Council.

International research can be of interest when considering such issues as expanding markets, revising ticket prices, appealing to particular markets (such as young people) or considering trends in taste and fashion.

There is a lot of information available, but you need to determine its relevance to your organisation. This will depend on the kinds of organisations involved in the research, the questions asked, how and when they were asked, and the size and type of people included in the research. Check the 'methodology' section of a report, as this usually contains this basic information.

For example, there may be a very interesting report on the Internet about how a well-known choral group in New York expanded their market. However, if your community choral society operates in a small regional centre, you will need to carefully analyse how comparable the two groups are and draw conclusions about the usefulness of the research.

On the other hand, a major study done in the UK on motivating teenagers to attend classical music performances may contain information and suggestions that are relevant for classical music companies in Australia.

EXAMPLE – secondary research identifying useful international information

The Vancouver Opera Company conducted audience research into potential audience development opportunities within the Chinese, Japanese, German and Italian communities. The results of the research indicated that German and Italian audiences, because they were already familiar with European music, would require relatively straightforward marketing efforts. For the Chinese audiences, a slightly different approach was required and implemented. First, the company established relationships with Chinese community groups. Research within these communities identified Madame Butterfly and Carmen as particular favourites. Promotions and incentives to attend these operas achieved positive results.

This approach has been studied by Australian organisations to apply to their own multicultural communities.

Primary research – conducting your own research

Primary research is original research carried out to answer a specific, unique research question.

Primary research takes time and money and should be undertaken only after you have looked at all the relevant and accessible secondary research.

There are two types of primary research – quantitative and qualitative.

- **Quantitative** – think of this as 'who' and 'what' research. You need to collect a lot of data to get useful information, so you need a 'quantity' of responses.

Quantitative research counts the number of people who behave in certain ways or hold certain attitudes. Often, quantitative research is conducted using questionnaires or surveys. It is perhaps the easiest research method for small to medium performing arts companies to conduct without specialist help. In Module C (the DIY Audience Research Questionnaire) we look at quantitative research in more detail and give you a research tool that allows you to do this type of research independently.

- **Qualitative** – think of this as 'why' research. You need to spend time with each person understanding 'how' and 'why' they do things or make decisions. It is the 'quality' of each interview that is important.

Qualitative research explores how people think or behave, and why. Usually, information is obtained through discussion, often in in-depth interviews or focus groups. Because the discussion depends on the interaction between a leader and the group, it is advisable to use experienced and well-briefed researchers. In Module B we look at qualitative research in more detail.

Who will you survey?

This will depend on your research objectives. You may want to conduct research with your existing audiences (or segments of that audience); or you may want to survey past audience members (for example, lapsed attenders or non-attenders). You might want to research new or potential audiences, or you could be interested in competitors or other leisure or recreational markets, such as pubs and clubs or festivals.

Once you have identified the group you want to research, you need to locate them and develop a survey they will be willing to answer. It is relatively easy to research current audiences, however if you are interested in researching non-attenders, you could talk to other relevant arts companies or venues about joint research.

A *sample* is the total number of people who complete the questionnaire or interview. There are three types of samples:

Random sample – everyone has an equal chance of being involved; for example, every third subscriber on the database.

Convenience sample – selecting a number of people where the target audience gathers; for example, 50 interviews with people in the foyer of the theatre before a performance. This is the most commonly used technique. The reliability is increased if surveys are conducted over a range of performances – weekdays, weekends or matinees.

Quota sample – where the interviewer is given a quota of different types of people by such characteristics as age, gender, location etc. The proportions are determined by reference to a census or other information sources. A good example is if you want to find the opinions of a statewide population, and one quarter live regionally, then one quarter of your sample should come from the regions.

How many people do I need to interview?

For most purposes, a sample size of between 100 and 200 is sufficient. However, if you want to examine sub-categories within the sample – such as those aged under 30, or people from regional centres – analysis of anything less than 50 responses in that sub-category should be treated with caution. It may be better to conduct a quota sample for that sub-category (for example, 50 people under the age of 30 years).

Always keep in mind the number of *completed* surveys you require and ensure you initiate enough to achieve that target. Use a 25 percent response rate as your rule of thumb – if you want 100 completed surveys, plan to contact at least 400 people (more for some types of surveys; see the chart below).

Offering an incentive (free tickets, merchandise etc.) will often increase the response rate, although it adds to your workload. It also removes the anonymity of the survey as you need to collect names and details for the prize to be awarded.

How do you conduct a survey?

The following chart documents different methods of collecting data.

Data collection methods continued

Method	Who	Where and when	Resources Required	Considerations
Self-completion questionnaire at theatre or by post	Current audiences	Onsite, questionnaires distributed before or after performances or during interval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questionnaire and pencils or pens People to distribute questionnaires Can be either completed immediately and deposited in marked boxes, or taken home and posted back using Reply Paid (remember to budget for cost of returned questionnaires) Onsite returns are quick; postal returns can be slow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must be (and appear) easy to complete Can distribute large number Easy to reach whole audience, difficult to reach only particular segments Watch for discarded questionnaires and littering Need to key responses into database; minimise need for handwritten answers People feel rushed or busy, may not take time to complete May not be statistically representative – certain people more likely to complete survey than others
Email	Current, lapsed	Office or home If sent to home, Friday catches people on the weekend when they may have more time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inexpensive, if done in-house Need up-to-date addresses Questionnaire needs to be well-designed for online responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally low response rates Bias towards Internet users

EXAMPLE — Using focus groups and surveys: La Mama Theatre, Melbourne

La Mama Theatre was reviewing a number of issues in relation to its programming. Working with a research company and funding from Arts Victoria, two types of research were conducted — telephone surveys and focus groups. Because La Mama has the names and phone numbers of most of its ticket buyers, the researchers were able to contact them directly to invite them to participate in a phone survey or focus group. La Mama found the research valuable in helping them make decisions about performance times; for example, they introduced earlier starting times and matinees for senior citizens, and matinees for children's programs. They also received useful feedback about their program and constructive criticism about the venue.

How is the focus group or interview conducted? What role does the facilitator play?

Before the focus group session or interview, the facilitator creates a discussion plan. This is done in consultation with the client, and outlines the basic questions to be considered. The plan acts as a reminder to the facilitator to make sure all the topics are covered. However, questions are not asked and answered in a consecutive fashion. The idea is to introduce a topic and, as much as possible, let the conversation go in whatever direction the groups takes it.

The facilitator begins the session with an introduction, explaining how long the interview will last, providing general information the participant(s) may require, and assuring everyone that the discussion will remain confidential. The assurance of confidentiality usually sets the group more at ease and assists in getting the conversation flowing.

A skilled facilitator is essential. They must manage the conversation flow, keep the group on the topics of interest, and avoid influencing the discussion in a particular direction or implying that some participants are on the 'right track' while others are not. Organisations often find that the best facilitator is someone who knows the company well, but is not directly involved in its management. They can keep the interview focused, but not become personally involved.

If you plan to do a number of focus groups or interviews, try to use the same facilitators throughout the process.

After the focus group sessions are completed, the facilitator prepares a report based on the interviews, including excerpts that are particularly relevant or interesting. The tape recordings of the sessions can be managed in several ways. In some cases complete transcripts are prepared, however this can be expensive and time-consuming. In other cases, staff listen to the tapes, prepare comments and analyse what they have heard. Generally, a combination of the two is useful. Take care to ensure the privacy of those participating and check that reports do not include information that could identify individuals.

Allow enough time for analysis

Analysing research can be time-consuming. You need to collect and check the questionnaires, prepare them for data entry, enter the data, then do the calculations and interpretation. Maintaining the same questions each time you do a survey makes it easier to compare results.

Most research uses a number of key techniques to analyse data. Consider the following:

- relative frequency: the number (or percentage) of respondents who give a particular response
- median: the mid-point, with half the respondents below this response and half above
- mean: the average response
- mode: the most frequently occurring response.

EXAMPLE 1 – A sample question and response data from the DIY Audience Research Questionnaire (refer to Module C for the full DIY questionnaire)

Q. How many times have you attended a performance by Company X in the last 12 months?

Times attended in past 12 months	Number of respondents	%
Three times	15	11
Twice	35	25
Once	40	28
Never	50	36
Total	140	100

Median – the point at which there are as many answers above as below 'Once'

Mode – the most frequent response 'Never'

EXAMPLE 2 – A sample question and response data from the DIY Audience Research Questionnaire

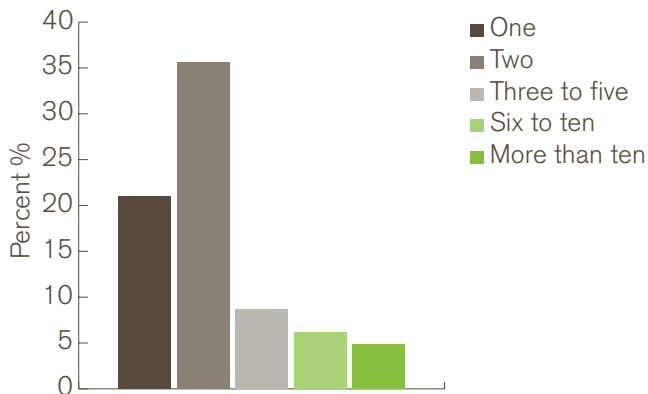
Q. Including this one, how many performances by this company have you previously attended?

Answer	No. of respondents	%
One	9	21
Two	16	36
Three to five	8	18
Six to ten	6	14
More than ten	5	11
Total	44	100

MODULE A

The following chart illustrates the response data from the above question.

How many performances by this company have you previously attended?



You may also want to consider cross-tabulating results. This means comparing information across questions; for example, analysing the ways in which people obtain information by the frequency of their attendance; looking at the age of subscribers in relation to the types of performances they attend, or in terms of whether they attend matinees or evening performances, on weekends or weekday evenings.

EXAMPLE OF CROSS TABULATION

Victorian Arts Audiences: Cross Attendance

People at these events	Who also attended these events					
	People (,000)	% of Victorian Population (adults)	Mainstream Theatre	Small – Medium Theatre	Comedy	Contemporary Dance
Mainstream Theatre	458	12.40%	–	31%	38%	16%
Small – Med. Theatre	266	7.20%	54%	–	48%	20%
Comedy	715	19.40%	24%	18%	–	8%
Contemp. Dance	210	5.70%	35%	26%	28%	–

Percentages indicate attenders at a given type of arts event (row headings) who also attended other arts events (column headings). For example, 31% of people who attended Mainstream Theatre events, also attended Small – Medium Theatre events in the 12 months prior to the research.

This information was undertaken by Roy Morgan Research in early 1997 on behalf of Arts Victoria and the Arts Marketing Taskforce.

It is important to consider the size of the sample when analysing sub-categories. If there are 100 survey respondents, but only eight of these are under 30 years of age, there is insufficient data to make informed decisions about the under 30 audience. A minimum of 50 responses in any single category is required to perform detailed analysis.

The more complex you want the analysis to be, the more data you may require, so try to keep the analysis simple and straightforward. If possible, reuse some basic questions each time you do a survey so that you can build up a detailed, comparable base of information.

STEP 7

Writing your report

Before you begin writing your research report, consider who will read it:

- How much do they need to know? (What level of detail do you need to provide?)
- How much time will they have to read the report?
- How much do they understand about audience research?
- How will they use the results?

You may end up writing more than one report, or writing a major report, then pulling out particular sections for different groups of people. You may decide to prepare:

- a detailed written report with an executive summary
- a summary report, covering only the major findings and highlights
- a talk or presentation
- workshops or seminars
- reports posted to your website
- media releases

A typical format for a written report should include:

- Executive summary – the highlights of the research
- Introduction – the background to the research
- Research objectives – what the research was intended to achieve
- Methodology – the type of research, number of surveys conducted, when and where the research was conducted
- Results – the findings of the research
- Summary and conclusions – the conclusions reached as a result of the research
- Implementation – how the research will be used by the organisation
- Appendices – a copy of the survey and any other detailed information as required

Keep a copy of the detailed report on your computer so that you can produce versions for sponsors, funding applications, your Board, annual report, and as supporting information for other activities.

Some tips for writing the research report are:

- Keep the audience for the presentation in mind. Don't use technical terms unless they will understand them
- Arrange the results in logical order (usually the order in which you asked the questions)
- Use tables and charts and label them clearly, but try not to use too many different types, as this can be confusing to the reader. Preface each results table with the relevant question
- Keep the main report as simple and straightforward as possible. Use appendices for detailed information
- Present the report in person to your Board and other key stakeholders so that you can go through it with them and answer any questions.

MODULE A

The most common types of charts are:

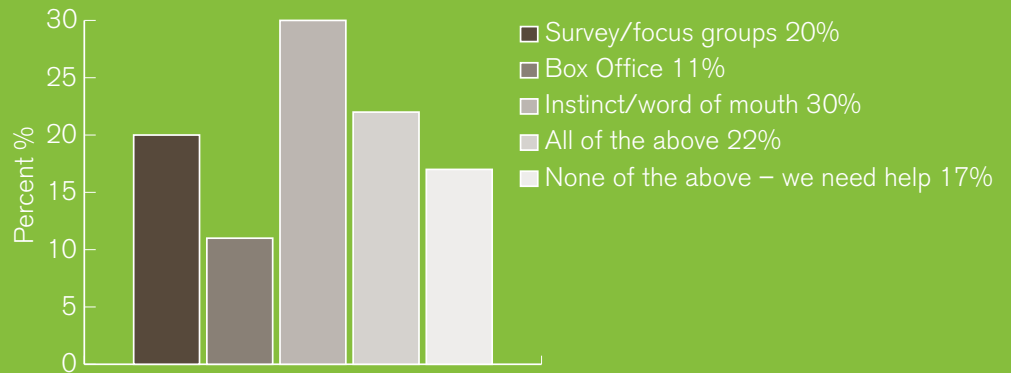
Bar charts. These work well when reporting on scales (for example, Very important to Not Important), or comparing audience segments or attitudes.

EXAMPLE of Bar Chart – Fuel4Arts monthly poll.

<www.fuel4arts.com>

Previous Poll on Audience research

How do you collect knowledge on your existing audiences?

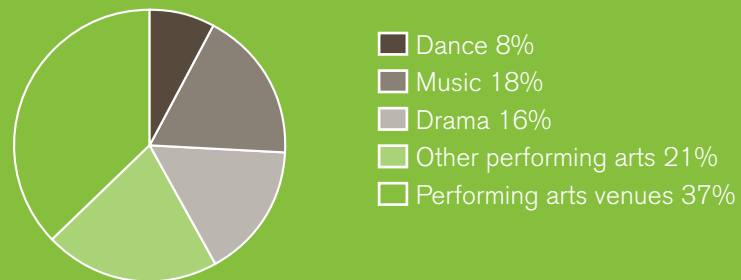


Pie charts. These work well when showing proportions of total audience.

EXAMPLE – Arts Victoria Arts Count

The performing arts sector, including venues, received around two-thirds of State Government arts funding in 2000-01. Of the \$20.6 million funding for non-government performing arts organisations, venues received the largest proportion (37%), followed by other performing arts (including festivals) and music.

Arts Victoria performing arts funding 2000–01



In 2000-01, Victorian-based arts organisations and artists received \$10.5 million in Australia Council funding.

