



## Consolidated Focus Group Report

# Engaging Next Generation Audiences: A Study of College Student Preferences towards Music and the Performing Arts

Hopkins Center for the Arts  
Dartmouth College

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With

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## **Background and Research Goals**

With funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Hopkins Center for the Arts at Dartmouth College commissioned a multi-site research effort in 2012 aimed at gauging how to maximize college students' performing arts attendance and participation, with a focus on the particular challenges of classical music. The study culminated in June 2013 with a national symposium of students, faculty and campus presenters drawn from the Major University Presenters (MUP) consortium to analyze and form action recommendations out of the research.

### Research Partners

- Hopkins Center for the Arts, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire (commissioning partner)
- Carolina Performing Arts, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina
- Hancher, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa
- Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Illinois
- Lied Center of Kansas, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas
- Texas Performing Arts, University of Texas, Austin, Texas
- University Musical Society, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan
- UW World Series, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington

The focus group research was led by WolfBrown of San Francisco, California, under the direction of Alan Brown and Jennifer L. Novak-Leonard.

### Research Questions

The overall purpose of the study was to inform the efforts of campus presenters in developing new and improved programs and activities for students.

The primary research questions addressed by the study are:

- What preferences, attitudes and past experiences with the performing arts do students have when they arrive at college?
- What types of presentations, formats and settings will attract more students?
- What should campus-based presenters be doing to better engage students?
- Knowing that not all students are alike, what strategies should be employed to attract different segments of students?
- How can students be actively involved with performing artists and the creative process?
- What introductory experiences and access should all students have, as a matter of policy?
- How can presenters work with faculty to make curriculum connections?

## Study Products

The research generated four products, which may be accessed separately:

1. **Overview of Findings and Call to Action**, a synthesis of all the research findings, to be combined with a summary of the June 2013 symposium and disseminated nationally;
2. **Case Studies in Good Practice**, a stand-alone report describing a wide range of existing practices in building student participation in the performing arts, from ticketing policies to academic integration;
3. **Consolidated Focus Group Report**, a high level summary of 18 focus group discussions conducted on seven campuses, with a deep focus on barriers to classical music attendance and strategies for surmounting them;
4. **Results of a Survey of Undergraduate Students on Seven University Campuses**, a detailed summary and technical report on a survey of 9,786 undergraduate students on seven campuses, covering arts participation patterns, music preferences and attitudes about classical music attendance.

All products from the study may be downloaded for free at a website set up by the Hopkins Center, at [https://hop.dartmouth.edu/online/student\\_engagement](https://hop.dartmouth.edu/online/student_engagement)

Questions about the study or its dissemination should be directed to Joe Clifford of the Hopkins Center or Alan Brown of WolfBrown.

## **Focus Group Methodology**

Each of the research partners was expected to organize, recruit and facilitate two focus group discussions with students, and to share their findings in written format with the other study partners afterwards. Recruitment techniques and logistical situations varied across the campuses. The two groups were to be stratified as follows:

- Group 1: Arts-involved students who are not music majors. This may include theater, dance, visual art and architecture students, or students involved in non-academic music, drama or dance ensembles, etc.
- Group 2: Non-arts, non-user students (i.e. students with no formal involvement in the arts, and who have never attended a visiting artist presentation – although they might have attended a film)

These were general recruitment parameters, and not all sites were able to stratify the groups as requested. Several partners used an online pre-recruitment survey to identify potential respondents, while others recruited from internal email lists or through campus partners. Use of incentives varied. One campus used a \$20 iTunes

gift card, another campus provided redeemable coupons for local coffee or gelato, and other campuses provided ticket incentives.

To support this qualitative research, WolfBrown prepared a moderator's discussion guide, including respondent handouts (Appendix 1), as well as guidelines for facilitating the focus groups (Appendix 2), and provided technical support via telephone. A total of 18 focus group discussions were conducted on seven campuses, encompassing 133 student respondents, as follows:

Dartmouth College (6 focus groups)\*  
Univ. of Washington (2 focus groups)  
Univ. of Kansas (2 focus groups)  
Univ. of North Carolina (2 focus groups)  
Univ. of Michigan/UMS (2 focus groups)  
Univ. of Texas (2 focus groups)  
Univ. of Illinois (2 focus groups)

\*Staff of the Hopkins Center for the Arts at Dartmouth College conducted three pilot tests of the focus group protocol in July 2012, with on-site support from WolfBrown, and another three discussions in November 2012, without on-site support.

The focus group research doubled as a learning experience for student researchers on each campus, who recruited the focus group participants, moderated the groups (in some cases), and prepared written notes. Upon receipt of everyone's written notes, WolfBrown prepared a compilation of focus group findings, and facilitated a conference call on Nov. 30, 2012 to review and discuss the results. This report is a distillation of the consolidated observations from the 16 focus group discussions, and also reflects the synthesis discussion.

### Limitations of the Data

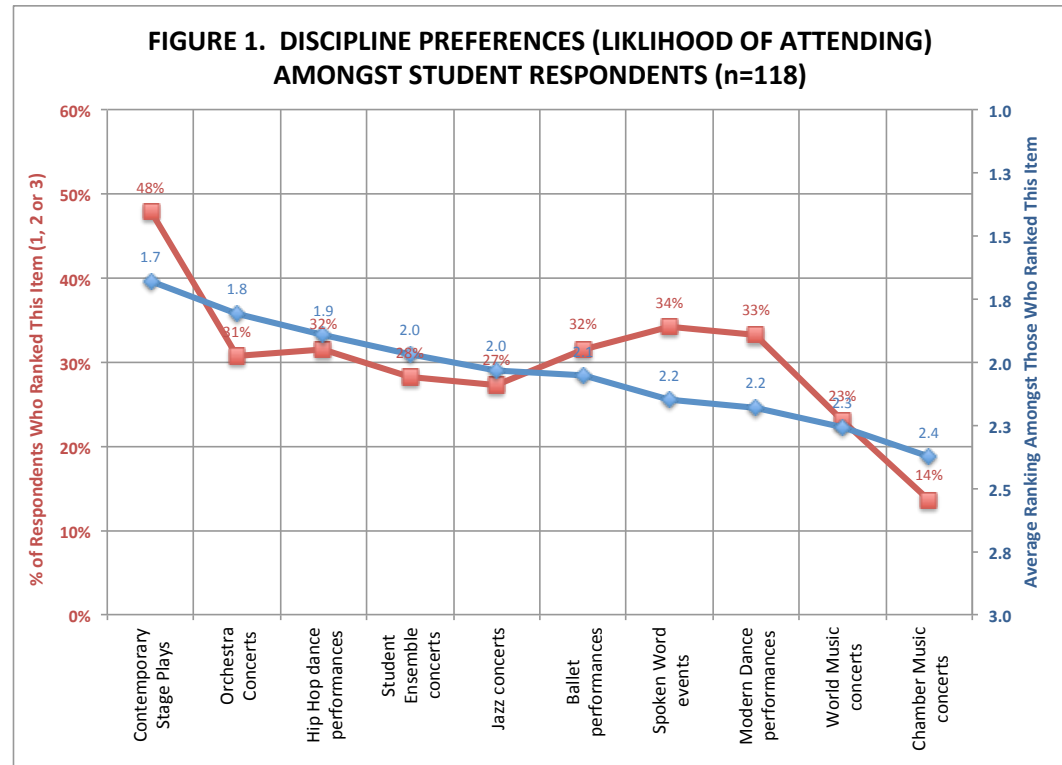
Focus groups are useful in defining issues that might otherwise remain vague, in evaluating concepts and creative work, and in generating other qualitative feedback that can have a direct impact on program design and marketing strategies. Caution and judgment should be used in evaluating qualitative research findings. The participants in these focus groups represent a very small sample of students.

In addition, group dynamics can have an impact on responses. Some respondents are reluctant to disagree with their peers, while others may provide answers that they think are desired by the moderator (i.e., acquiescent response). Although we work to minimize these and other biases in designing and moderating the groups, some amount of bias is present, inevitably, in the data. The reader is cautioned that the findings from these discussions cannot be statistically projected or generalized to the larger population of college students.

## Summary of Findings

### General Performing Arts Preferences

Of the 10 types of performances tested (see Handout #1, Appendix 1), focus group respondents were most likely to rank “contemporary stage plays” as one of the three art forms that they are most likely to attend (48%), all else being equal. The average ranking for “contemporary stage plays” was also the highest of the 10 (avg. ranking of 1.7, with “1” being the top ranked item).



On the low end of the scale, “chamber music concerts” was ranked by the smallest group of respondents (14%), and also given the lowest average ranking (avg. ranking of 2.4, with “1” being the top ranked item). With some exceptions, there is a natural relationship between the incidence of assigning a rank and the mean ranking, suggesting a symbiosis between familiarity and preference. The exceptions are “spoken word events” and “modern dance performances,” which generated somewhat lower preference rankings in relation to the probability of assigning a ranking. Unfortunately, it is not possible to analyze differences in preferences for students with more or less involvement in the arts. (This information will be available through the quantitative survey.)

Note that orchestra concerts received the second highest overall ranking (1.8), while chamber music received the lowest overall ranking (2.4), suggesting that conventionally presented chamber music concerts are not a good entry point for

students. This does not mean that unconventional chamber music presentations (i.e., unconventional with respect to artist, format or setting) will not appeal to some.

While these results might be seen as somewhat of a popularity contest driven by familiarity, there are implications for how presenters might think in terms of points of entry for student audiences. In general, the diversity of findings across sites suggests that presenters should think in terms of offering multiple points of entry for students, not just a single point of entry. Moreover, the optimal points of entry may vary from campus to campus, depending on the amount of cultural diversity amongst students.

The ability of the human voice to express poetry, emotion and vocal rhythm came through as an underlying attribute driving preference for “contemporary stage plays” and “spoken word.” The availability of a plot to follow was cited as a common factor associated with preference for ballet and stage plays. Interest in classical music tended to be driven by the promise of virtuosity or a celebrity performer.

A strong finding across the focus groups was the appeal of student ensemble performances, driven by a personal connection to one or more student performers. Results suggest that student performances can serve as a key point of entry, both in terms of social accessibility and price.

Overall, results indicate several different entry points for students, such as:

- Stage plays with contemporary plots
- Orchestra concerts that involve a visual element (e.g., film scores)
- Hip hop dance performances, perhaps involving a social dance event in conjunction with the performance
- Student ensemble performances
- Performances featuring star performers
- Performances in informal settings, or featuring unconventional formats

Negative experiences at performing arts programs relate to “stuffy audience” experiences, behavioral restrictions imposed by the setting, programs that are perceived to be too long, lack of intimacy in concert settings, and lack of connection with the artists, especially orchestras.

Obstacles to attending live classical music concerts include a lack of sufficient stimulation (i.e. visual elements, plot, lyrics), not understanding “how to listen,” and lack of something “rare” or “unique” in performance. Students expressed the view that live concerts are long in duration, very formal, lack a compelling visual element, and demand a high level of intellectual engagement. As a result, students without musical training feel they will not relate to the music. Several students who enjoy listening to classical music recordings expressed the view that they would only be attracted to live concerts with a unique feature, such as a celebrity performer, a novel setting, or special event.

### Preference Discovery

While some students seek out new artistic influences on their own, the data strongly suggests that taste is socially transmitted. Students expressed interest in learning about the musical tastes of people they like, and people they want to know better. Numerous students described learning about new artists from friends, typically through personal recommendations via social media or music sites. The dominant online environments for acquiring musical tastes are Spotify, Pandora, Facebook, YouTube, and various streaming audio services. Spotify, in particular, was cited as a medium for sharing of playlists between friends, thus allowing students to explore the musical tastes of others.

Results strongly suggest that campus presenters who aspire to reach more students must actively promote music artists through Spotify playlists, Pandora channels and YouTube channels.

Music festivals were also cited as an important source of information for learning about new or unfamiliar music artists. Presenters who want to know more about the musical tastes of college students would do well to follow the burgeoning music festival scene (e.g., Coachella, Electric Daisy Carnival, Electric Zoo Festival).

Personal interactions with artists were cited by several respondents as a catalyst for reversing negative perceptions of a particular kind of music.

### Negative Perceptions of Classical Music

Students curate the music in their lives, creating a soundtrack that is intimately interwoven with their daily activities. Different music is used to accompany different activities. Most students reported listening to classical music while studying (i.e., as an aid to productivity, particularly while writing long essays), or as an antidote to stress. To some, classical music is a sleep aid, or a meditative aid, especially solo piano music (but not music with a vocal element). While the soothing aspect of classical music is a positive connotation, the pervasive attitude that classical music is a background phenomenon – or a sort of creative elixir or enabler for doing other things – presents real challenges to presenters of live concerts.

*“I always think of it as background, not a show. I wouldn’t want to pay for something that I don’t view as a show.”*

By extension, counteracting this perception requires presenters to do one of two things: 1) re-frame the concert experience as more of a “show” – with additional layers of artistic and social stimulation; or 2) acquiescing to the perception of classical music as a secondary activity, and creating concert events at which students may do other things, like study or paint – however antithetical this may seem to the principles of “good listening” advocated by Aaron Copland and others.

Another theme across the focus groups was the problem represented by lack of words or lyrics, which provide another way of “knowing” music. Music without words, therefore, is seen as requiring more concentration or intellectual work.

Instead, students reported being attracted to styles of music that are “fun” or “cool” and don’t require “a high mental capacity.” One might infer that live classical music – if one is to truly pay attention to it – is regarded by some as a scholarly intellectual challenge. In fact, some articulated the fear of not understanding the music as a reason for not going, and suggested that most students will revert to activities they actually enjoy doing, over activities they “should be doing.”

*“I don’t want to be an ignorant audience member...”*

*“It’s sort of like the caviar of food. It’s seen as an elitist, acquired taste.”*

Students who received musical training prior to arriving at college were much more likely to express positive preference for attending live classical concerts. How can campus presenters identify and engage these students in advocating for classical music amongst their friends, and activate them as transmitters of taste?

Students who are not classically trained can be overwhelmed and intimidated by the specter of learning about classical artists and repertoire. Where do you start, if you don’t know the way in? Classical music presenters must solve this problem if they hope to attract more students to classical music.

*“I don’t have a classical music playlist because I don’t know which pieces I would like to listen to, or should listen to.”*

The general impression imparted by students with lukewarm feelings about classical music is that the live concert experience lacks sufficient interactivity (e.g., ability to sing or dance along to the music) and a lacks enough sensory stimulation. Students cited theatrical art forms such as dance and musical theater as having satisfying visual features and a plot or story to follow.

*“If I’m just listening to something, I will probably zone out and stop paying attention. I need something to keep my eyes busy.”*

*“I get bored listening to classical music. I tend to zone out.”*

For students without a background in classical music, there is not enough else (besides the music) to anchor the experience in some modicum of familiarity. This is especially problematic in light of the intense level of visual stimulation associated with lighting and video effects at popular music concerts. Thus, one can infer that introductory concert experiences will have both interactive features and multiple layers of sensory stimulation that allow young adults to relate to the experience on multiple levels (physical, social, emotional, intellectual).

Format is another barrier, particularly the length of concerts and the perceived level of effort required to concentrate on the music for what is seen as a long period of time.



*“Personally, my attention span isn’t long enough. I really like classical music if I’m doing something else. But sitting there listening to it for an hour and a half can get really long unless I’m watching a friend or if a specific piece that I like is being performed.”*

There is also the perception that leaving early is socially unacceptable and therefore not an option. All of this amounts to a high commitment threshold, which is anathema to some students who prize their flexibility and have difficulty committing to anything more than a short time in advance. This further implies that introductory classical music experiences will draw on alternative formats featuring shorter pieces (perhaps even in random order) and allow students with multiple opportunities to “opt out” without embarrassing themselves.

### Stimulating Demand for Classical Music

Results of the focus group research help to frame the riddle of demand for classical music amongst college students and post-college young adults. Many do not reject classical music out of hand as their parent’s music, and, in fact, listen to classical music regularly as part of their musical mix. However, there appears to be a disconnect between their consumption of classical music in a personal listening environment (i.e., curating digital content to one’s personal satisfaction) and the live concert experience (a fixed experience curated by someone else).

Bridging the gap between these diverging modalities of consumption will require classical music presenters and artists to re-contextualize the live concert experience, and to think of students as a heterogeneous constituency with varying tastes and varying appetites for challenge.

Extrapolating from focus group data, including an exercise during the focus group discussions in which students were asked to design their “ideal concert experience” in terms of format, setting, style, duration, etc., the following strategies for attracting more students to classical music concerts are suggested:

- Engaging students in the curatorial mode of music participation (i.e., downloading, organizing, editing, making and sharing playlists) in connection with concerts by visiting artists, thereby building a bridge between the live and personal listening modalities;
- Creating curated music listening spaces (e.g., a music lounge), where students can drop by and listen to classical music, as a low-threshold introduction to the art form;
- Altering concert formats to lower the perceived commitment level (e.g., shorter sets, more intermissions, collage formats);
- Scheduling concerts at times that work well for students;
- Experimenting with new combinations of setting and format, to create an entirely new concert experience designed for students and young adults (e.g., holding concerts in venues where students can sprawl out on the floor and study or meditate);

- Adding visual elements to live music, not just ambient lighting, but lighting and video elements that add an artistic dimension to the music;
- Ensuring that students have an opportunity to meet personally with artists (or hear artists talking from the stage), as the personal connection can reverse negative perceptions;
- Hiring artists who are closer in age to students, so that students' formative experiences with classical music are not associated with a generation gap;
- Providing socializing opportunities adjunct to concerts; if possible, creating concerts especially for students, to reinforce perceptions of peer support for the art form;
- Building curricular connections, such that live concerts are embedded in more students' academic experiences (thereby circumventing self-selection barriers).

This report is the first in a series of research reports stemming from the Hopkins Center's multi-site study of student engagement in the performing arts. Subsequent reports will summarize results of a survey of undergraduates on eight campuses, as well as results of extensive case study research, culminating in a synthesis report on the entire study.

## Appendix 1

### Hopkins Center for the Arts Multi-Site Study of Student Engagement in the Performing Arts

## Discussion Guide for Student Focus Groups

#### Materials Checklist

- Name plates
- Handouts
- Method for documenting conversation (e.g. note-takers, recording, etc.)

#### Moderator's Introduction (5 minutes)

- Moderator's self-introduction
- This is an informal focus group; introduce any observers sitting in the room
- Purpose of the discussion is to learn about feelings about different kinds of arts programs
- The discussion will last for two hours
- Honorarium [describe the incentive being used, if any]

#### Explanation of the Focus Group

- The confidentiality of your remarks is assured – your comments will not be associated with your name, so please be as candid as possible.
- If you'd like to add something to the conversation, please raise your hand and the moderator will call on you as quickly as possible.
- The moderator may call on people from time to time, even if they don't have their hand up, in order to make sure that everyone gets a chance to speak.
- As the discussion gets going, please feel free to disagree with something and say, "I have a different opinion about that..." because it's very important that we hear differing opinions
- Any questions before we start?

#### Introduction of the Participants (working clockwise around the table/room)

Let's begin with introductions around the table. Briefly, tell us...

- Your first name
- What is your present class or level of study?
- What is your main area of study?
- Outside of attending classes and studying, how do you like to spend your time?

Module 1: Product Category Preferences

[Distribute Handout #1 “Types of Live Performances”]

I’d like you to think about all the different kinds of live performances that you might attend, such as theatre, music and dance. Take a look at the types of performances listed on Handout #1. I’d like you **rank the top three items on this list in terms of your likelihood of choosing to attend them**, all else being equal. So, read the list, then write a number “1” next to your first choice, then a number “2” next to your second choice, and a “3” next to your third choice. I’ll give you just a minute, and then we’ll talk about your answers. [pause until everyone is finished]

1. **How about [first type of performance]? Did anyone rank this as #1 or #2? Why?**

Probe: [in reference to respondent’s first choice] **What makes [type of performance] appealing to you? Did anyone else rank this as #1 or #2? Why? For the same reason, or different reasons?**

2. [working through the list of performance types] **How about [next type of performance]? Did anyone rank this as #1 or #2? Why? What is it about [type of performance] that you like?**

3. **Are there any types of performances on this list that you’d absolutely not attend? Why? What about them do find unappealing?** [probe for drivers of negative preference]

Probe: **Have you ever gone to an arts performance that you thought you would dislike, but wound up liking it, or at least finding yourself engaged?**

Probe: **Have any of these experiences happened since you’ve been at Dartmouth?**

Probe: **Why? What stood out to you about it?**

[Moderator: Collect sheets in order to tabulate ranking results later]

Module 2: Attitudes about Classical Music and Concert Attendance

Now, I’d like to focus our discussion on music.

4. **My first question is —How do you learn about songs or artists that are new to you?** [elicit top-of-mind answers]

Probe: **Do you actively seek out new music?**

5. **Can you give me an example of how you learned about a new artist, or how you learned to like a style of music that you didn't like before?**

Now, I'd like to ask you about classical music, in particular.

6. **Think about the last time you heard classical music. Where were you?**

Probe: **Did you choose to listen to classical music, or was it a random encounter?** [Note: Do not spend much time investigating situations where students hear classical music involuntarily.]

Probe: **What were you doing?**

Probe: **Why do you choose classical music over some other kind of music in that setting?**

7. **Are there any other situations in which you sometimes choose to listen to classical music?**

Probe: **What are they? What purpose does classical music serve in that situation?**

8. **Suppose you were required to attend a concert by a visiting orchestra for a class. Would you be excited, indifferent, or reluctant to go? Please be as honest as possible.**

Probe: **Why is that?**

9. **A quick show of hands. A) Who has attended a classical music concert at [presenter]? B) Since starting your college career, who has attended a classical music concert anywhere?**

10. **Does your frequency of attendance at live classical music concerts reflect your overall level of interest in classical music?**

Probe: **If you listen to classical music on your own, but don't attend live concerts, why is that?**

11. **Would you ever go to a concert alone?** [explore social norms, especially differences between males and females]

Probe: **Why or why not?**

12. **How do your friends feel about classical music?** [explore stereotypes and cultural norms amongst students]

Probe: **Do they have a positive opinion, negative opinion, or is just not on their radar?**

Probe: **Think about one of your closest friends or roommates. If you invited that person to a concert by an orchestra, how would they react?**

### Module 3: Preferences & Decision-Making

[Distribute Handout #2 “Design your ideal concert...”]

**Now I’m going to ask you to construct your ideal concert experience. Handout #2 lists a number of possibilities for different aspects of how you might construct a concert of your own design. If you could customize the experience, which combination of factors would you choose? Please mark a check next to one item from each list, and then we’ll talk about your answers.**  
[pause until everyone is done]

13. [Moderator calls on respondents randomly. Discuss each topic, suggested order: Type of Setting, Formality, Time/Day, Duration, Format, Visual Enhancements, Performing Forces and Kinds of Music] **[Name], tell us what you selected and a bit about why you chose that option.**

[Moderator: Collect sheets in order to tabulate ranking results later]

### Wrap-Up Question

14. **What could [presenter] do to make classical music concerts more attractive to you and increase your likelihood of attending?**

### Module 4: Role of the Campus Presenter [optional, time permitting]

15. **Why do you suppose that more [Dartmouth] students don’t attend live performing arts programs offered by [the Hopkins Center]?**
16. **Are the visiting artist presentations offered by [the Hopkins Center] relevant to you?**
17. **What could [the Hopkins Center] do to attract more students?**

# Handout #1 – List of Types of Performances



contemporary stage plays:  
Rank: \_\_\_\_\_



hip hop dance performances  
Rank: \_\_\_\_\_



jazz concerts  
Rank: \_\_\_\_\_



world music concerts  
Rank: \_\_\_\_\_



spoken word events  
Rank: \_\_\_\_\_



orchestra concerts  
Rank: \_\_\_\_\_



ballet performances  
Rank: \_\_\_\_\_



chamber music concerts  
Rank: \_\_\_\_\_



modern dance performances  
Rank: \_\_\_\_\_



student ensemble concerts  
Rank: \_\_\_\_\_

# Handout #2 – Design your ideal concert experience by mixing and matching different elements from the lists that follow:

## **Kinds of Music**

- Large symphonic works
- Film scores
- Chamber music
- Opera
- Choral music (e.g., gospel or sacred music)
- American folk music
- Jazz
- Music of different world cultures

## **Performing Forces**

- Symphony orchestra
- Chamber orchestra
- Chamber ensembles (e.g., woodwind quintet; string quartet, piano trio)
- Percussion ensemble
- Period music (e.g., Baroque) ensembles
- Solo instrumentalist
- Solo vocalist
- Vocal ensembles

## **Duration**

- Two-hour concert
- Short concerts (e.g., 45 or 60 minutes)
  
- With intermission
- Without intermission
- Extended intermission

## **Formality**

- No talking by the musicians (i.e., very formal)
- Musicians provide brief introductions of each piece from the stage
- Extensive explanations and musical examples (i.e., very informal)

## **Format**

- Conventional format (pre-published program)
- “Collage” format (continuous music without any advance announcement of the program)

## **Visual Enhancements**

- No visual enhancements
- Subtle ambient lighting
- Live digital video effects

## **Type of Setting**

- Concert hall or theatre
- Church or synagogue
- Dining hall
- Bar or club
- Outdoor park or garden
- Private home
- Art museum
- Empty warehouse
- Hotel ballroom

## **Day/Time**

- Thursday at 8:00 pm
- Friday at 10:00 pm
- Saturday at 4:00 pm
- Saturday at 10:00 pm
- Sunday at 10:00 am
- Other day/time [choose any combination]:

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Your initials: \_\_\_\_\_



# Appendix 2: Focus Group Facilitation Guide

Prepared by WolfBrown

Facilitation is, by definition, a dynamic, unpredictable and participatory activity. The process of speaking with people yields valuable information that you would not get if someone else facilitated a conversation and wrote a report for you. During most discussions, a great deal of data is communicated non-verbally, through body language, hesitation, gestures and intonation. No matter how good the researcher, it's just not the same as experiencing it in person. This is why the exercise is so rich. Which brings us to the hardest part of facilitating discussions – listening. A good facilitator is a good listener. Listening requires a great deal of concentration. A good listener understands what the respondent is saying, and also thinks about what the respondent is *not saying*, or *trying to say*. Good listening is *bearing between the lines*, and gently coaxing the respondent to elaborate on a point (i.e., probing) until you have a satisfactory response. A good listener hears when the respondent is having difficulty answering a question, and re-phrases the question or illustrates a response drawing from her own experience. "Maybe I can help you with this question by telling you how I would answer it for myself..." Perhaps the most difficult aspect of facilitating is simultaneously concentrating on what the participant is saying and also having a sense of where the discussion is going – whether to probe deeper or move on to the next question.

## The Discussion Setting

A comfortable, intimate setting can contribute a great deal to a productive conversation. Use your own judgment in deciding where to talk to people, but the Facilitator should be able to make eye contact with each of the discussion participants. The Recorder may sit anywhere else in the room, preferably with a clear view of the participants. Remember that during the discussion, the Recorder is a silent observer and not a discussion participant. Participants should be informed at the beginning of the conversation that notes will be taken, but no identifying information will be associated with the responses and the notes are for research purposes only.

## Role of the Facilitator

The Facilitator is the person who leads the discussion and assumes primary responsibility for the outcome. The Facilitator should be familiar with the protocol in advance of the discussion and, if possible, should practice the questions and think of potential probes.

The discussion topic guide is a road map for your conversation. But there are many pathways to a successful, productive discussion. Ultimately, each discussion group will have a unique flow. The protocol should be used as a *guide to your conversation*. The final authority on how you manage the conversation belongs to the Facilitator. After posing a question, allow the participants time to formulate a response. If a participant has difficulty with a question, the Facilitator may re-phrase the question

or provide a “probe” on the respondent’s answers, asking follow-up questions, some of which are in the protocol, but some of which may be asked spontaneously. Don't be afraid to manage the conversation proactively, if you can do so without offending the participants. As you get into the protocol, try to do a minimum of talking, and avoid offering your own personal opinions on a subject. Make a point of involving all participants in the conversation; you may need to call on people directly if they are not offering responses to the group.

### **Role of the Recorder**

The Recorder's job is to capture the conversation in as much detail as possible, including some verbatim quotes. Notes may be taken by hand or typed into a computer, whichever the Recorder prefers. Some hints on note taking:

- Use shorthand to refer to different participants, i.e. you can number the different participants, “R1” respondent #1.
- If the respondent says something emphatically or repeatedly, underline the comment or idea in your notes, to suggest emphasis
- Circle comments or ideas that YOU think are important
- If you’re typing notes into a computer, don't worry about spelling mistakes; getting the ideas down is more important

During the conversation, capture any particularly interesting or representative comments that the respondent offers. You'll have to write (or type) fast. Use quotation marks to delineate verbatim comments such as:

“They made me feel like my gift was the lynchpin of the whole project.”

You should also write down some of your own observations as you go, such as:

- “R2 is uncomfortable with this question.”
- “R1 experiences art through her children, but not independently.”
- “R4 is frustrated for lack of a creative outlet.”

These observations will help you remember some of the key themes of the conversation when you have the debriefing session afterwards. The role of the Recorder is essential. Without an audiotape, the Recorder's notes represent the best record of what transpired.

### **After the Discussion**

Within a day or 2 following the discussion, identify the few most salient aspects of the conversation. Move through the protocol and briefly discuss your impressions of the participants’ answers and distill some key observations. This debriefing is an essential component of the process. Without it, you’re likely to lose a great deal of the data.