



## **THE ARTS ARE RADICALLY LOCAL: SMU'S NATIONAL CENTER FOR ARTS RESEARCH (NCAR) RELEASES WHITE PAPER SHOWING HOW DISTANCE MATTERS AS A BARRIER TO ARTS PARTICIPATION**

Dallas (SMU), October 26, 2017 – SMU's National Center for Arts Research (NCAR) today released a white paper describing the behavior patterns of arts audiences and how the distance between households and arts venues influences the likelihood of arts participation. Through this examination, this report is designed to promote a deeper understanding of the opportunities that exist to better satisfy the needs of arts audiences and to remove real and perceived barriers to arts attendance. Read the white paper on [NCAR's website](#). The research was supported by a grant from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.

As expected, as the distance between a household and an arts venue increases, the propensity to purchase decreases. Taking a more nuanced look at the issue, the paper asks three central questions:

- What distances are relevant?
- To what extent do community and household characteristics influence the relationship between distance and participation?
- What other market factors affect patronage?

“A key driver of successful audience building initiatives is a profound understanding of how cultural consumers calculate not only the benefits but also the real and perceived costs of engaging with an arts offering,” said NCAR Director Zannie Voss. “This paper sets out to highlight critical factors that influence a consumer’s decision of whether to attend or not to attend the arts, the barriers and opportunities in attracting cultural audiences, and their potential implications for arts organizations as well as cultural and urban planners around the country.”

In order to examine the purchase likelihood for households surrounding *individual organizations*, NCAR analyzed box office data in five markets, obtained through partnership with TRG Arts, for a total of 90 visual arts, performing arts, and community-based organizations that collectively serve 2.4 million unique households. Key findings from the report include:

- **The arts are radically local.**

Data analysis shows that distance plays a more critical role than initially estimated. Based on research findings in other settings, NCAR researchers assumed that arts purchase likelihood would gradually decrease with distance, dropping by 80% for households that were roughly seven miles from an arts organization. However, the report reveals that in the average community, the likelihood of patronage drops off much sooner—it's down by 80% at about the one-mile mark.

- **The arts become even more radically local for those in low socioeconomic communities.**  
Socioeconomic characteristics heavily influence behavior patterns of arts audiences. Although households with higher income and education are more likely to participate in the arts and are more willing to travel greater distances to attend, lower income households are more likely to be deterred by distance as the non-monetary costs such as the hassle of travel compound the financial barriers of attending. At a distance of approximately one mile, the report shows that high income households have 17% greater purchase likelihood than households in low income neighborhoods.
- **Population density has a modest effect on propensity to purchase – but it has a negative impact at greater distances.**  
A household in a densely populated neighborhood is less likely to purchase if it is located further away from an arts organization. At the same distance, a household in a low-density area has a higher propensity to purchase.
- **Arts organizations in leisure destinations benefit from an overall increase in purchase likelihood as these districts attract more people from greater distances.**  
The report shows that organizations surrounded by complementary leisure attractions (including bars, restaurants, and hotels) enjoy a 5% increase above the baseline purchase likelihood from neighborhoods located three miles away. At greater distances—at about 19 miles—purchase likelihood is nearly 60% higher for organizations that have restaurants, bars, and hotels nearby. At these distances, people perceive distance as less of a barrier to attending as it means they are able to couple their arts participation with other leisure activities.
- **Given the choice, people demonstrate a preference for staying in the neighborhood.**  
In markets with intense arts and cultural activity, people are more likely to attend, and they are especially more likely to attend organizations close to home. When they have no choices nearby, they are more likely to travel further if doing so means accessing a concentrated arts district.

## **About NCAR**

In 2012, the [Meadows School of the Arts](#) and [Cox School of Business](#) at SMU launched the National Center for Arts Research (NCAR). The vision of NCAR is to act as a catalyst for the transformation and sustainability of the national arts and cultural community. The goals of the Center are to unlock insights on: 1) arts attendance and patronage; 2) understanding how managerial decisions, arts attendance, and patronage affect one another; and 3) fiscal trends and fiscal stability of the arts in the U.S., and to create an in-depth assessment of the industry that allows arts and cultural leaders to make more informed decisions and improve the health of their organizations. To work toward these goals, NCAR integrates data from DataArts and its Cultural Data Profile<sup>1</sup>, TRG Arts, and other national and government sources such as Theatre Communications Group, the League of American Orchestras, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Census Bureau, and IRS 990s. NCAR makes its findings available free of charge to arts leaders, funders, policymakers, researchers, and the general public.

NCAR develops reports based on this uniquely comprehensive set of arts organizations' data. It assesses the industry from multiple perspectives, including sector/art form, geography, and size of the organization, and it determines what drives health from the organization's conditions and its community's characteristics. Recent publications include a white paper on [diversity and equity in the arts](#), a white paper [dispelling the myth that the arts are elitist](#), and [reports on the health of the U.S. arts and cultural sector](#). In July 2016, NCAR launched the [KIPI Dashboard](#), a free online diagnostic tool that allows arts organizations to benchmark their individual performance in nine finance and operations categories against their peers.

For more information, please visit the NCAR website at [smu.edu/artsresearch](http://smu.edu/artsresearch).

## **About the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation**

The mission of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation is to improve the quality of people's lives through grants supporting the performing arts, environmental conservation, medical research and child well-being, and through preservation of the cultural and environmental legacy of Doris Duke's properties. The Arts Program of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation focuses its support on contemporary dance, jazz, and theater artists, and the organizations that nurture, present, and produce them. For more information, please visit <http://www.ddcf.org>.

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<sup>1</sup> DataArts is a nonprofit organization that empowers the arts and cultural sector with high-quality data and resources in order to strengthen its vitality, performance, and public impact. For more information, visit [www.culturaldata.org](http://www.culturaldata.org).