

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **The Wallace Foundation Releases Video and Written Accounts of Ballet Austin’s Market Research Targeting New Audiences**

*First in a Building Audiences for Sustainability (BAS) Stories series to learn how arts organizations expand and diversify targeted audiences*

**NEW YORK, February 16, 2017** – The Wallace Foundation today released the first installment in its *Building Audiences for Sustainability (BAS) Stories* series that looks at the early-stage efforts of arts organizations in a new Wallace initiative that are seeking to attract new audiences, while retaining the ones they have. The new story features Ballet Austin, with both written and video components at [www.wallacefoundation.org/BalletAustin](http://www.wallacefoundation.org/BalletAustin), presenting emerging insights into the company’s work to expand and deepen their audience’s engagement in multiple forms of ballet.

Ballet Austin has received funding through the foundation’s Building Audiences for Sustainability (BAS) initiative that provides funding to 25 performing arts organizations across the United States to develop, implement, analyze, and learn from audience-building practices. Using examples from the work of Ballet Austin and other BAS organizations, the *BAS Stories* project seeks to expose the process of arts organizations working to expand their audiences, with the goal of helping other organizations to understand the significance of market research and continuous learning—and adjustment on the basis of what is learned—as necessary first steps.

“Building audiences is certainly among the most pressing challenges facing arts leaders today, but many organizations lack the resources and information they need to adopt practices that will help them be more effective,” said Daniel Windham, the foundation’s director of arts. “The Wallace Foundation is committed to helping the organizations we fund directly to expand their audiences, while commissioning research on their efforts to build helpful knowledge for the field. This new story on Ballet Austin’s work, and others like it, present an organization in the midst of its work to bring new dance to new audiences.”

The Ballet Austin story focuses on the company’s use of market research to learn more about what is and is not working. The data they collected challenged their assumptions on the nature of barriers to bringing in new audiences, particularly for less traditional work. The initial assumption within the organization was that patrons would move along a “familiarity continuum” from well-known, narrative works (like *The Nutcracker*) to more contemporary, non-narrative pieces by less-familiar choreographers.

In 2015, Ballet Austin began a six-year project to study what factors influenced attendance among single-ticket buyers. Using surveys, focus groups, and ticketing database analyses, the staff found

that encouraging more attendance was less about increasing audience familiarity with particular ballet productions and more about bridging what they called an “uncertainty gap”—helping audiences feel comfortable with the experience they were about to have. As a result of the research, Ballet Austin ended some programs and developed others that more effectively bridged that gap. For example, the company stopped live-streaming dress rehearsals and, instead, launched Ballet-o-mania! Interactive Discovery Lounge, a pre-performance display that allows patrons to learn more about the works they are about to see on stage.

The story—to be followed by others—details how the company used market research to track the effectiveness of these new programs and provides an insider’s perspective on the company’s premises, research methods, findings, and strategies for implementation. Though the work is just starting, the story highlights the significance of these preliminary insights, which helped Ballet Austin figure out how to more deeply engage the Austin community; to grow as an institution; and to create more targeted programming, events, and resources to bring newer ballet to broader audiences.

“As we began using market research to test our hypothesis of what would draw patrons to attend programs with less-familiar work, we were surprised at what we found, and we adjusted our strategies accordingly,” said Cookie Ruiz, executive director of Ballet Austin. “Market research has become an essential piece of our strategic planning process as we continue to ask ourselves what we know and what we need to know about our audiences. Adopting these practices has had an enormous impact on our organization, and we hope others in our field can benefit by our sharing this story.”

The *BAS Stories* series captures early insights on the audience-building work of arts organizations participating in the initiative, before the independent evaluative reports commissioned by Wallace have been completed. The foundation has commissioned the University of Texas at Austin to conduct a \$3.5-million evaluation of the initiative to enable that the efforts of the selected arts organizations will inform and strengthen the audience-building efforts of performing arts organizations nationwide. The evaluation will assess whether and how the 25 organizations made audience gains, whether these gains were sustained, and whether and how the gains contributed to the organization’s overall financial health. The study will produce a series of public reports to be published over the course of the initiative, beginning with a review and analysis of existing research in mid-2017.

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## **About Building Audiences for Sustainability**

Ballet Austin is one of 25 performing arts organizations chosen to participate in The Wallace Foundation’s **Building Audiences for Sustainability** effort, a six-year, \$52-million initiative aimed at developing practical insights into how arts organizations can successfully expand their audiences. Building Audiences for Sustainability continues the foundation’s 25-year history of support for the arts, with a particular emphasis on building audiences.

Representing a spectrum of organizations—from dance and opera companies to orchestras, theaters, and multidisciplinary arts institutions—the selected partners receive financial and technical support from the foundation to research and develop their audience-building work. The evidence gathered from these organizations will be documented and analyzed by an independent team of researchers at the University of Texas, Austin, providing valuable insights, ideas, and information for the entire field.

The projects carried out by the arts organizations are designed to reach a variety of diverse audiences, including racial and ethnic groups, age cohorts (primarily young people), and people working in

specific sectors. Strategies include commissioning new art that resonates with particular groups, involving target audience members in the creation and selection of works to be performed, creating events that allow audience members to gather and learn more about the art, and staging works in non-traditional venues that are more easily accessible to the target audience.

### **About the Wallace Excellence Awards**

Findings achieved through Building Audiences for Sustainability build on insights and solutions from the **Wallace Excellence Awards** initiative, a multi-year effort, concluded in 2014, that supported audience-building projects in 54 visual and performing arts organizations in six cities around the country: Boston, Chicago, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Seattle.

An analysis of 10 case studies of these projects identified nine evidence-based actions that organizations can take to successfully engage audiences. The analysis, [\*The Road to Results: Effective Practices for Building Arts Audiences\*](#), written by Bob Harlow, an expert in market research, is available on the Wallace website, along with the 10 [case studies](#).

### **About the RAND Framework**

The initiatives have their intellectual underpinnings in a seminal, 2001 RAND report [\*A New Framework for Building Participation in the Arts\*](#). The Wallace-commissioned report suggests that building arts audiences refers to one or more of three activities: “broadening” audiences (increasing an audience size by bringing in people who are already inclined to enjoy the art form but are not current audience members), “deepening” (having current audience members attend more often), or “diversifying” (engaging new groups). It also identifies ways arts organizations can build audiences while avoiding hit-or-miss efforts that waste scarce resources. The approach stresses that audience-building work must be tightly aligned with an arts organization’s mission, resources, and operations, and that the work needs to be continuously studied and refined.

For more information on **Building Audiences for Sustainability** or on other Wallace arts initiatives, please visit: [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org).

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### **About The Wallace Foundation**

*Based in New York City, The Wallace Foundation is an independent national philanthropy dedicated to fostering improvements in learning and enrichment for disadvantaged children and the vitality of the arts for everyone. It seeks to catalyze broad impact by supporting the development, testing, and sharing of new solutions and effective practices. At [www.wallacefoundation.org](http://www.wallacefoundation.org), the foundation maintains an online library about what it has learned, including knowledge from its current efforts aimed at: strengthening education leadership to improve student achievement, helping selected cities make good afterschool programs available to more children, expanding arts learning opportunities for children and teens, providing high-quality summer learning programs to disadvantaged children and enriching and expanding the school day in ways that benefit students, and helping arts organizations build their audiences.*

**Press contacts:**

**Resnicow and Associates**

Barbara Escobar: [212-671-5174](tel:212-671-5174), [bescobar@resnicow.com](mailto:bescobar@resnicow.com)

Sarah Palay: [212-671-5163](tel:212-671-5163), [spalay@resnicow.com](mailto:spalay@resnicow.com)

**The Wallace Foundation**

Jessica Schwartz: [212-251-9711](tel:212-251-9711), [jschwartz@wallacefoundation.org](mailto:jschwartz@wallacefoundation.org)