

Cultivating the Next Generation of Art Lovers: How Boston Lyric Opera Sought to Create Greater Opportunities for Families to Attend Opera

Instructor Guide

Driven by the desire to capture a new audience, Boston Lyric Opera believed that those most likely to participate in opera as adults were introduced to the art form at an early age. This belief drove efforts of program development that broke down barriers of entry and engaged families. This case study analyzes the efforts made and the logic behind these decisions, revealing what worked and what did not.

Key Themes & Subject Areas

1. **Venue and Location Partnerships:** Given the requirements needed to stage a full-scale opera production, limitations are set on Boston Lyric Opera's pool of potential venue choices. Explore how BLO researches venues in areas where opera fans live as well as venues that have a pre-established familiarity with families.

2. **Program Development and Implementation:** BLO believes that "an expanded family performance program could accomplish several educational, artistic, and marketing goals at once:

1. Introduce elementary school-age children to the art form;
2. Provide an opportunity for parents to experience a live performance with their children;
3. Create the seeds of a new generation of opera lovers."

Expanding upon a Family Performances series, already in place, BLO frames its efforts to produce "opera for children, not children's opera," which will introduce young people to works they might see again as adults.

3. **Marketing and Communication:** BLO explores how to market opera to familiar and unfamiliar audiences via direct mail and a word-of-mouth campaign established targeting parents interested in opera who have

attended a performance. Shared community lists are used for direct mails to residents in performance neighborhoods who have been identified as arts patrons.

4. Removing Barriers of Entry: Opera reportedly has the narrowest fan base among all of the major performing arts. Due to an aging demographic of major supporters, most opera companies are faced with the task of cultivating new audiences at all times, a task that takes major investments. The BLO identified that “the single biggest challenge for this entire target market is that they are busy with children,” and developed programming that worked to eliminate issues such as travel time to a venue in downtown Boston and length of production (typically 3 hours).

Teaching Concepts

1. Discuss the complexities of audience development with **Introductory and Advanced Arts Management and Arts Marketing Students**. Use this guide to demonstrate the importance of understanding and overcoming potential barriers of entry for target populations you want to attract.

2. With **Arts Marketing or Advanced Arts Management Students**, discover how BLO faces problems attracting new audiences. The family performance program appealed primarily to adults who had attended opera already. The most consistent factor affecting audience size was the physical location of the performance. Areas known to be strong opera markets consistently outperformed the locations in areas less populated by known opera lovers.

3. For **Introductory or Advanced Arts Administration Students**, Explore how BLO struggled to appeal to a diverse adult audience or address perceptual barriers among adults. Discuss how the lack of

research into specific perceptions of opera and perceptions of BLO held by community members in some of the neighborhoods held the programs back from reaching bigger audiences.

4. With **Arts Education or Advanced Arts Management Students**, see how BLO tailored their family performances to the way children watch and understand the performing arts. Using feedback from both family and school audiences, adjustments were made to ensure the stage direction and actions were appropriate for children's social and emotional development levels.