CULTURE + COMMUNITY IN A TIME OF CRISIS

A SPECIAL EDITION OF CULTURE TRACK®

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Methodology

Goals of the Study

The initial research questions were: How can cultural organizations help their communities and audiences get through this pandemic? How can communities and audiences help cultural organizations emerge stronger and more connected to the needs of the community? How can we use the crisis as a spark for adaptation and to make progress on long-standing problems?

Cultural leaders need an ongoing, nuanced dialogue with their communities and audiences about what really matters and what comes next — not only after the pandemic and the resulting economic disruption, but also during and after the resurgent struggle for racial justice sparked by the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police. That dialogue, mediated by mixed-methods social research, will inform the urgent work of change in human resources, community collaboration and service, artistic and educational programming, strategic planning and forecasting, digital engagement, marketing, fundraising, etc.

The need to understand and be in conversation with participants, staff, and patrons and partially explains the current profusion of research studies being conducted in the U.S. and Europe. But so far, most of those studies have chosen to take a narrow rather than a holistic view of the challenges ahead, inquiring almost exclusively into the likelihood, timing and conditions for people to resume engaging with culture in the ways they had engaged before the twin crises. Most have chosen to survey active cultural consumers but not the broader, demographically representative U.S. population and concentrate on revenue-generating behaviors rather than what people have been going through emotionally and physically during these painful times, or what they need from culture now. From the start, we saw 'need' both from the perspective of people and communities and from the perspective of the institutions.

Sampling Overview

Probability sampling, in which respondents are chosen at random, is the standard basis for selecting respondents so that conclusions can be made from a sample to the full population. It relies on the principle that everyone has an equal chance of being chosen (at random), so you can get a representative sample by hearing from a very small proportion of the population. However, given the statistical advantage of large samples and the costs of collecting random samples, statistical methods (weighting techniques) exist to combine samples of different kinds.

In this situation, we're combining a probability sample (AmeriSpeak) with nonprobability samples from the lists of arts & culture organizations. We've partnered with statisticians at NORC, pioneers in combining samples, to create one sample that's representative of the U.S. population that "gives weights" to individual respondents from both the AmeriSpeak sample and the list samples. This approach results in an extremely large total sample size, which allows us to do a lot of dividing and comparing sub-groups within the data set while still being representative of the U.S. population as a whole.

Sampling Framework

We developed a dual-sampling framework for this study because there were two groups that we felt were crucial to hear and learn from: the general public and active arts and culture attenders. In reality, these groups overlap extensively, and our approach to handling that overlap is discussed below.

General Public Sample

For the sample of the general public, we collaborated with the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), a leading research center based at the University of Chicago. NORC maintains a panel, AmeriSpeak, that provides coverage for over 97 percent of U.S. households (Yang, Ganesh, Mulrow, and Pineau 2018).

All U.S. respondents (age 18 or older) were eligible for participation. Statistical weights for the AmeriSpeak sample were calculated using panel base sampling weights to start (the inverse of probability of selection from the NORC national frame) and were then raked to external population totals associated with age, sex, education, race/ethnicity, housing tenure, telephone status, and Census Division. The external population totals are obtained from the February 2020 U.S. Census Current Population Survey.

In total, we collected responses from a sample of 2,027 adult American respondents through the AmeriSpeak panel, with a weighted cumulative response rate of 6% and a margin of error of +/-2.88%; the panel survey was fielded between April 29 and May 13, 2020. In addition to the high level of representative coverage of the NORC panel, we chose to work with the AmeriSpeak team because of the statistical expertise in weighting data of their personnel, particularly with respect to combining probability and non-probability samples.

Arts and Cultural Attenders Sample

For the sample of arts and culture attenders, we also invited any primarily adult-serving arts and culture organization in the United States to send the survey to a portion of its audience email lists at no cost to the organizations. In return, these organizations were promised that they would have access to their respondents' survey response data, and that those responses could be compared to the national sample.

We shared this opportunity through social media and emails to our networks of clients and colleagues, and we worked with a group of eighteen advisors as well as a range of service organizations and professional networks to spread the invitation. The advisory group was composed of cultural leaders and technical experts. Service organizations that promoted the study and encouraged participation on the part of their members included the American Alliance of Museums, the League of American Orchestras, Opera America, and the Alliance for the Arts in Research Universities.

In all our communications, we emphasized that we particularly encourage small cultural organizations and ALAANA-focused or BIPOC-focused organizations* to participate in the study, because we suspected they would be underrepresented among these networks. We also reached out directly to over a hundred ALAANA-serving organizations with an invitation to participate in the research.

*ALAANA-serving organizations are those whose primary audiences and/or content is focused on Asian, LatinX, African American, and Native Americans. BIPOC-focused organizations are those whose primary audiences and/or content is focused on Black, Indigenous, or other People of Color.

Participating Organizations

In total, 653 organizations distributed the survey to a portion of their lists. Those participating organizations included arts councils, crafts, arts schools, film centers, radio stations, architecture centers, botanical gardens, historical societies, museums of all types (art, cultural, history, science, natural history, children's), zoos and aquaria, dance companies or venues, orchestras, opera companies, performing arts centers, theater companies or venues, and photography centers. They had a median budget of US $5,000,000, a median staff size of 45 full-time employees, and a median audience size of 90,000 visitors or attenders per year.

The organizations represented most heavily represent museums and the performing arts (see Table 1). Organizations from 48 states, DC, Puerto Rico, and 2 Canadian provinces participated in the research (149 from the Midwest, 173 from the Northeast, 194 from the South, and 133 from the West Census Region, 1 from Puerto Rico, and 3 from Canada).

The full list of participating organizations is available at www.culturetrack.com/covidstudy

Table 1

The number and proportion of participating organizations classified by micro arts category

Micro Arts Category	Number of Participating Organizations	Proportion of Participating Organizations
Architecture	1	<1%
Arts Councils	8	1%
Arts Schools and Instruction	1	<1%
Botanical Gardens/Arboretum	44	7%
Crafts	5	1%
Dance	21	3%
Historical Societies	4	1%
Motion Pictures	3	<1%
Museums - Art	164	25%
Museums - Cultural	17	3%
Museums - History	42	6%
Museums - Natural History	15	2%
Museums - Other	7	1%
Museums - Science	33	5%
Music - Chamber Music	7	1%
Music - Other	18	3%
Music - Symphony	76	12%
Opera	15	2%
Performers (not elsewhere classified)	1	<1%
Performing Arts Centers	34	5%
Photography	1	<1%
Radio	1	<1%
Services	15	2%
Services and Facilities	5	1%
Theater & Comedy	106	16%
Zoos or Aquaria	8	1%

Distribution

Participating organizations were asked to send the survey to a sample of up to 5,000 people randomly drawn from their lists. We provided recommended survey invitation language along with an organization-specific survey link (URL). In the suggested invitation language, we noted that participants may receive the invitation from more than one organization, and we asked them to please respond to the survey only once. As an incentive, respondents were offered the chance to win one of twenty-five VISA gift cards each worth $100. A website with frequently asked questions, information about the organizations involved in the study, and the drawing rules were available to respondents. The survey was hosted on the Decipher survey platform, a sophisticated online research tool operated by FocusVision – who agreed to provide the platform free of charge as an in-kind donation to the cultural sector.

The survey was distributed to more than 2.4 million people through participating organizations. Given the scale of that sample, we needed to ensure that survey respondents wouldn't overwhelm the Decipher platform. So organizations were provided a date and time window for distribution between April 29 and May 3, 2020 with backup options available on May 4-5. The list-sample survey was kept open through May 19, 2020. We received 121,730 responses for a response rate of approximately 5% (not all organizations reported to us how many survey invitations they had distributed).

Although this side of the sampling frame was meant to capture arts attenders and subscribers, museum visitors and members, and other active cultural participants, we should emphasize that not all of these respondents were highly affiliated with the organization from whose list they received the survey invitation. Such lists include people whose emails were collected by the organization for a spectrum of reasons, e.g. in exchange for free on-site wifi, to register for an event or program, or to purchase tickets, memberships, or subscriptions.

Dual-frame Weighting

For our analysis, it was important to combine the two samples, the representative AmeriSpeak panel sample and the non-representative audience-list sample, into one combined dataset representative of the general U.S. population. We worked with statisticians at NORC to create a set of weights drawing from what we know of the behavior of the population-representative sample, then applied those weights to each respondent from the audience-list sample to bring that "cultural oversample" into line with the actual proportion of Americans with those levels and types of arts participation.

Why Weighting?

These weights help counter the affinity bias we know exists on the lists of cultural organizations toward those with the highest levels of affiliation (e.g., donors or members/subscribers) to better reflect the average participating in arts and culture activities. Indeed, we found that the unweighted responses from arts and culture organizations were disproportionately white, compared to the panel data which has been weighted to the U.S. population (see Table 2).

The racial or ethnic groups with the widest gaps in representation on the lists of arts and culture organizations are Hispanic or Latinx respondents and Black or African Americans. Given that disparity, it feels critical to share our initial analyses from these two demographic groups in particular, in the hope that a better understanding of the behavior, perceptions, preferences, and needs of underrepresented communities will inform arts and culture organizations working towards deeper relevance and more inclusive engagement.

Table 2

The proportion of survey respondents by Hispanic or Latinx ethnicity and race for the unweighted list distribution and weighted AmeriSpeak Panel data*

	Unweighted list data (n=108, 641)	Weighted AmeriSpeak Panel data
Hispanic or Latinx	5%	17%
Asian or Pacific Islander	4%	3%
Black or African American	3%	13%
Native American	<1%	<1%
White or Caucasian	85%	61%
Two or more races	2%	4%
Other race	1%	1%

The combined weights were constructed using a machine-learning procedure to identify the variables that were most influential in predicting being in the non-probability (i.e., audience-list) sample (Yang, Ganesh, Mulrow, & Pineau, 2019; Mulrow, Ganesh, Pineau, & Yang, 2020). The most influential variable was past cultural attendance, but the weights also included activities during COVID-19, emotional impacts of COVID-19, past affiliation with arts and culture (e.g., donation, subscription, membership), education level, employment status, income, metro area, race and ethnicity, region, and age.

*In accordance with the Census, we define race as a person's self-identification with one or more social groups. Ethnicity determines whether a person is of Hispanic or LatinX respondent origin or not. For this reason, ethnicity is broken out in two categories, Hispanic or LatinX respondent or Latino and Not Hispanic or LatinX respondent or Latino. Hispanic or LatinX respondents may report as any race.

Works Cited

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