

Opening New Doors: Hands-on Participation Brings a New Audience to The Clay Studio

Instructor Guide for The Wallace Foundation's Wallace Studies in Building Arts Audiences

In 2007, The Clay Studio (TCS) in Center City, Philadelphia, was approaching its 30th anniversary when the staff recognized that young professionals from the surrounding neighborhoods were absent from TCS's patron demographics. Research was conducted to pinpoint programming elements that appealed to younger clay novices and determine communication avenues most effective for reaching this target market.

This case study describes how The Clay Studio explored alternative options for its programming and education class formats, making adjustments in time, day, and length of required commitment for participation, in order to access new audiences. Developing an awareness of the barriers keeping students from attending course offerings allowed TCS to rethink their calendar, messaging, and design of communication tools. And an examination of program approaches for gallery talks and exhibit opening receptions brought fresh ideas to draw younger patrons into the audience. A major success was seen with the creation of *Date Night*, one-off classes for young professionals and many other education program lessons learned are described in detail in this report.

Key Themes & Subject Areas

- 1. Marketing and Communications Strategy** - TCS maneuvered away from a one-size-fits-all communication tool into a segmented communication strategy targeting the different audience segments with the goal of simplifying its messaging for each audience and reaching the right audiences using the right media and placements.
- 2. Supply and Demand: How Economic Principles Were Applied to Class Calendar Structure** - With a goal of deepening engagement with the organization and attracting younger audiences, TCS decided to change its product in order to increase demand for its classes. Focus group responses revealed that the targeted young professional audience had reservations for committing to an 8 to 10 week class period offered at an average of \$275. With the understanding that cost and time were major prohibitors, TCS set out to develop shorter, cheaper, introductory classes that were more inviting and served to introduce its participants to the art form and the organization.
- 3. Aligning Program Expansion with Mission Statement**- TCS revised its mission statement in 2012 in conjunction with its program expansion so that the mission

“reflected a broader range of activities and its pride in serving a diverse audience” (page. 63).

Teaching Concepts

1. Discuss what wasn't working about the **class structure and programming** at TCS and how they developed easy to sell introductory classes and gateway experiences to develop a wider reach and increase participation. Use “*Facilitating Active Participation*” on page 56 as a guide for this conversation.
2. Begin on page 34 and walk through each step taken to create an effective **marketing strategy** for the different audiences TCS targets. Examine the role that images played in the communication tools and on the TCS website. How did the organization change gears with their visual tools and printed pieces in order to spark interest and make readers feel invited and inspired to visit and take a class?
3. How did the rewrite of the **mission statement** for TCS open doors for the organization? Compare and contrast the former mission statement with the new version (Page 63) and discuss as a class the pros and cons of each. Analyze what programming opportunities the new mission statement made room for and identify what opportunities were not in alignment with the original mission statement. Is the new mission statement more welcoming to clay novices and ceramic aficionados alike?