



# Arts Participation

STEPS TO STRONGER CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY LIFE

Chris Walker  
with Cory Fleming  
and Kay Sherwood

# Arts Participation

## STEPS TO STRONGER CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY LIFE

**People participate in arts and culture in four primary ways: they attend programs and events, encourage their children to participate, make or perform art as amateurs, or support the arts through donations of time and money. The more ways people participate—and the more often—the more likely they are to engage in other activities that support community life.**

These findings can enhance the efforts of arts and cultural providers and supporters to increase arts and cultural participation by working with their existing bases of support to intensify involvement. Encouraging people to advance along a “ladder of increasing commitment” within these four types of cultural participation will benefit not only artistic institutions but civic and community organizations as well. Increased participation, in turn, strengthens the case for providing political and economic support of arts and cultural institutions as valuable community assets.

These findings come from the recent Cultural Participation Survey conducted by the Urban Institute and funded by The Wallace Foundation as part of an evaluation of the Community Partnerships for Cultural Participation (CPCP) initiative.<sup>1</sup> The survey asked residents in five communities about their attendance at live music, dance, and theater performances and their visual arts experiences, as well as about other forms of participation in arts and culture and in civic affairs. Responses to the survey suggest new ways to think about connections between arts and cultural participation and community participation.

Indications of Americans’ declining involvement in civic affairs have recently attracted media attention and national concern.<sup>2</sup> If participation in community activities is indeed declining, continued civic health may depend on nurturing those institutions in which people remain actively involved. Promoting more arts and cultural participation, and the institutions that foster it, is therefore an important way to help strengthen communities as well as the arts and cultural institutions themselves.

### IN THIS BRIEF

- How Arts Participation Contributes to Arts & Community
- Four Ways to Participate in Arts & Culture
- Arts Participation & Levels of Personal Commitment
- Arts Participation & Community Participation

<sup>1</sup> Some of the findings presented in this brief are published for the first time here. Others are discussed at some length in Chris Walker and Stephanie Scott-Melnik with Kay Sherwood. 2002. *Reggae to Rachmaninoff: How and Why People Participate in Arts and Culture*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute.

<sup>2</sup> See Robert D. Putnam. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

## CULTURAL PARTICIPATION SURVEY

The Urban Institute conducted a telephone survey of adults in five of the CPCP communities in the fall of 1998. The purpose was to collect information about individual participation in a range of arts and cultural activities. A random sample of adults in the five communities was contacted, producing 2,406 responses. The main topics of the 20-minute survey were:

- **Methods of Participation**—defined as attendance at live arts and cultural programs and events, donations of time and money to arts and cultural organizations, and pursuit of personal artistic expression.
- **Motivations** for participation.
- **Venues** for participation — *where* people had attended live music, theater, and dance performances and *where* they had viewed painting, sculpture, architecture, and other visual arts.
- **Participants' Background**—questions about respondents' income, education, religion, immigrant status, organizational memberships, and other personal and household characteristics.

The five communities surveyed are diverse in terms of their populations' background characteristics. They are:

- **The Kansas City Metropolitan Area**
- **Humboldt County, California**
- **Mayfair, San Jose, California**
- **Milpitas, California**
- **Gilroy, California**

## CPCP SURVEY COMMUNITIES

**The Kansas City Metropolitan Area**, including 1.4 million residents of five counties in Missouri and Kansas. This area resembles the rest of the country in its mixture of urban and suburban, rich and poor, and crowded and sparsely populated sections. More than four out of five residents are white; most of the rest are African American and, increasingly, Hispanic.

**Humboldt County, California**, a largely rural county of about 120,000 people, with the largest population centers in the cities of Eureka and Arcata. Humboldt County's economy was built around the timber industry, although the southern part of the county is dotted with farms. About 88 percent of the county's population is white, although there is a substantial Native American population, which was oversampled in the Urban Institute's Cultural Participation survey.

**Mayfair, Milpitas, and Gilroy, California**. Within Silicon Valley, a popular name for Santa Clara County, Mayfair is a one-square mile, low-income neighborhood in San Jose, with about 6,000 Hispanic and, increasingly, Asian residents. Milpitas, an affluent suburb of San Jose with about 50,000 residents, is about one-half white, one-third Asian, and one-fifth Hispanic. Gilroy is an agricultural town containing 39,000 residents, about half of whom are Hispanic.

## EXHIBIT I

### HOW ARTS AND CULTURAL PARTICIPATION CONTRIBUTES TO CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY LIFE

| Types of Arts and Cultural Participation                                                                      | Contributions to Arts and Culture                                                                                                                                                                | Contributions to Community Life                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Attendance at live programs or events</b>                                                                  | Strengthens arts and cultural institutions by maintaining and expanding their audiences.                                                                                                         | Sustains and increases connections among people. Contributes to economic development of business districts and neighborhoods. Supports vitality of community spaces, including schools and places of worship.                                                                                   |
| <b>Amateur art-making</b><br>(in private, for family or friends, or in public)                                | Deepens personal understanding of art and cultural forms.<br>Creates opportunities for others to experience arts and culture.<br>Supports arts groups that rely on unpaid performers.            | Provides shared cultural experiences among family, friends, neighbors, and others that strengthen social ties. Helps preserve cultural practices specific to ethnic groups or regions.                                                                                                          |
| <b>Socialization of children</b><br>(taking them to events or arranging lessons outside school)               | Encourages development of skills and habits of cultural participation.<br>Builds appreciation of arts and cultural experiences, leading to long-term audience building and fostering of support. | Encourages children and youth to participate in community-sanctioned activities. Builds personal and social skills. Fosters habits of participation that may carry over to other aspects of community and civic life.                                                                           |
| <b>Support for artists or arts organizations</b><br>(through financial contributions or volunteer activities) | Builds the capacity of arts and cultural organizations to offer varied, high-quality programs. Creates opportunities for people to experience arts and culture.                                  | Strengthens ability of arts organizations to engage in education and community outreach. Supports major institutions that are sources of community pride. Helps community-based organizations that rely on arts and cultural programs for member services, social programming, and fundraising. |

## Contributions of Arts Participation to Arts and Community Life

Exhibit 1 illustrates how the four forms of participation in arts and culture—attendance, amateur art-making, socialization of children, and financial or volunteer support—can add value to both arts and culture and the larger community. The suggested benefits to arts and culture are drawn from Urban Institute research in the CPCP communities and other arts and culture research.<sup>3</sup> Possible contributions to community life are less well documented but widely acknowledged

by many who are active in the arts, especially those who work in community settings.<sup>4</sup> The findings in this brief lend support to these presumed relationships, indicating that various types of participation in arts and culture are related to one another and to participation in civic, religious, and community activities. Arts organizations and community groups can take advantage of these connections in pursuit of their respective missions.

## Four Ways to Participate in Arts and Culture

People most often participate in arts and culture by attending programs or events. Three-quarters of the respondents to the CPCP survey, who were age 18 or older, reported attending an arts and cultural program or event in the past year. But there are at least three other ways to participate. Nearly two-thirds of those with children under age 18 reported taking their children to arts and cultural events or arranging for lessons outside of school. About half of all respondents reported creating or performing art. About a third contributed money or time to support artists or arts organizations. Exhibit 2 compares participation rates for these four types of participation.

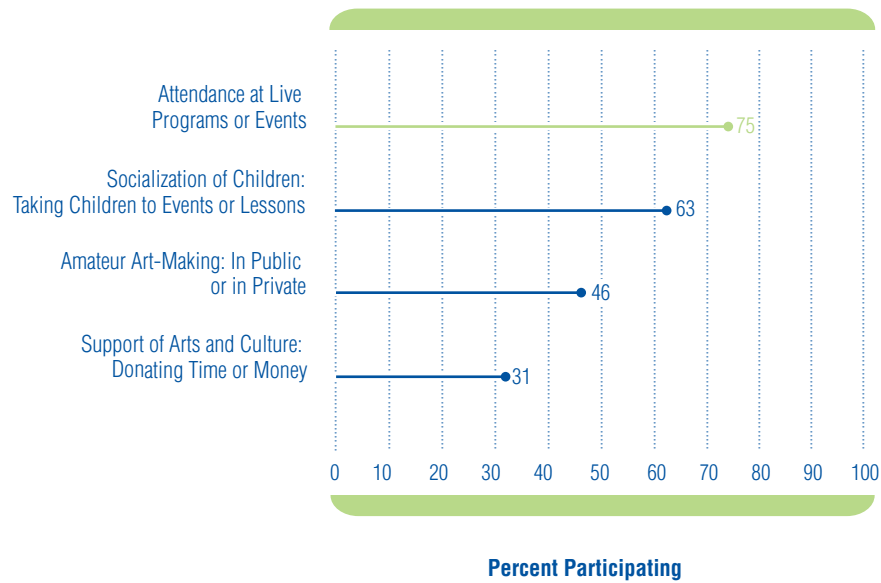
Within the four types of participation, people engage in activities requiring different levels of commitment of money, time, or skill. For example, a significant portion of survey respondents reported performing or creating art in private for family and friends, but relatively few had taken the additional step of presenting their work publicly, which entails a higher degree of skill, motivation, and personal resources. For the most common type of participation—attending live arts and cultural events—individuals who favor a wide range of musical, dance, dramatic, and visual arts styles tend to have different levels of commitment than those who attend only a narrow range of styles, as will be shown below.

<sup>3</sup> Walker and Scott-Melnik, *op. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> See William Cleveland. 2000. *Art in Other Places: Artists at Work in America's Community and Social Institutions*. Westport, Conn: Praeger.

## EXHIBIT 2

### RATES OF PARTICIPATION IN FOUR FORMS OF ARTS AND CULTURAL PARTICIPATION



#### SOURCE

Urban Institute:  
1998 Cultural Participation Survey

#### NOTE

Figures based on N of 2,406 from five communities.

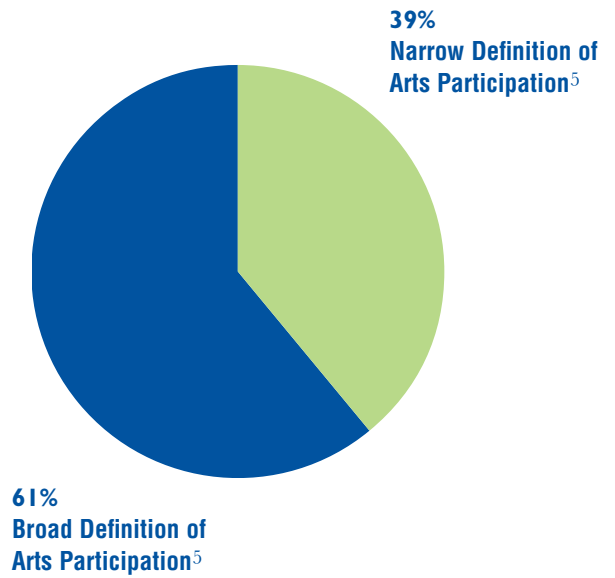
Within the four types of participation, people engage in activities requiring different levels of commitment of money, time, or skill.

### Attendance at Live Programs or Events

The CPCP survey used both broad and narrow definitions of participation in arts and culture, finding that the majority of those who attended arts and cultural events attend a wide range of programs (see exhibit 3).<sup>5</sup> Sixty-one percent of people surveyed who attended arts presentations over the course of a year chose to attend those that fell into a broad range of artistic styles. The remaining 39 percent chose to attend only programs or events that fell into a narrow range of styles. As it turns out, those who attend performances or events in a broad range of styles also tend to participate in the arts in other ways, such as engaging in amateur art-making, involving their children in the arts, and supporting the arts through volunteering or financial contributions.

#### EXHIBIT 3

##### ATTENDANCE AT LIVE PROGRAMS OR EVENTS



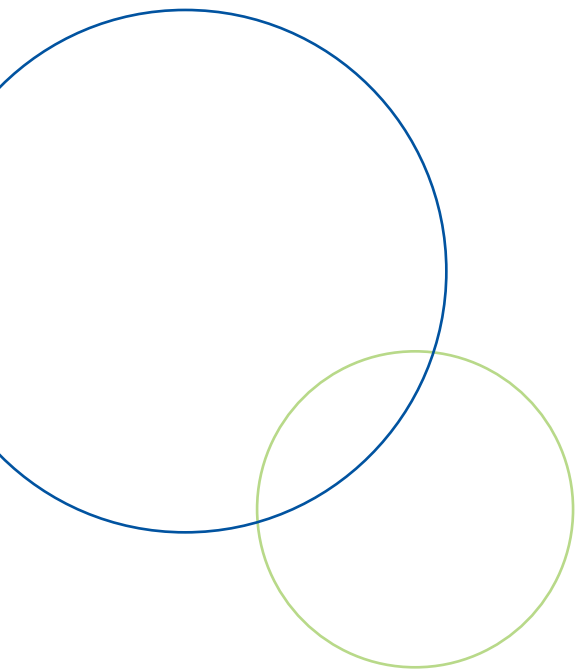
#### SOURCE

Urban Institute:  
1998 Cultural Participation Survey

#### NOTE

Figures based on N of 2,406 from  
five communities.

<sup>5</sup> The survey asked about attendance at *any* form of arts and cultural program or event, regardless of whether it is conventionally thought to be “art.” For example, respondents were asked to report whether they had attended any classical music or opera performance over the past year, but also whether they had attended a performance of jazz and blues, rock and roll, ethnic or folk music, or any other form of music they cared to mention. In this brief, those who attend arts programs or events in styles conventionally thought to be “classical” (e.g., symphonic music) and in those conventionally thought to be “popular” (e.g., rock and roll music) are considered as participating in a broad (versus narrow) range of styles. Those participating in a narrow range of styles attend in only one of the two style categories.

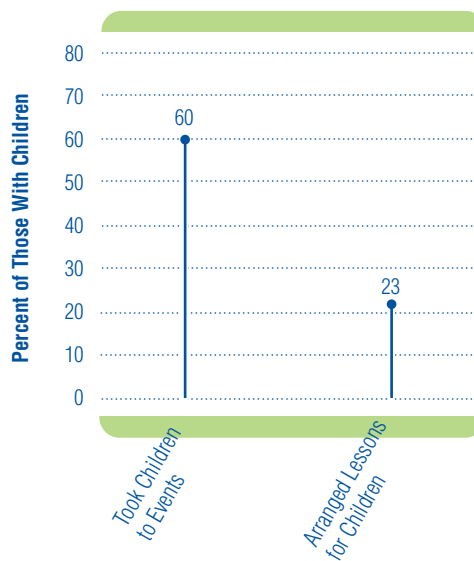


### Socialization of Children

Most of the surveyed adults with children under 18 encouraged them to experience and learn about art (see exhibit 4). Sixty percent had taken their children to an arts program or event in the past year, and 23 percent arranged for their children to take lessons outside of school. Demonstrating the different levels of commitment within this form of participation, only 39 percent of adults who took their children to arts and cultural programs also arranged lessons for them, while nearly all adults who arranged lessons also took their children to events.

## EXHIBIT 4

### SOCIALIZATION OF CHILDREN



#### SOURCE

Urban Institute:  
1998 Cultural Participation Survey

#### NOTE

Figures based on N of 2,406 from  
five communities.

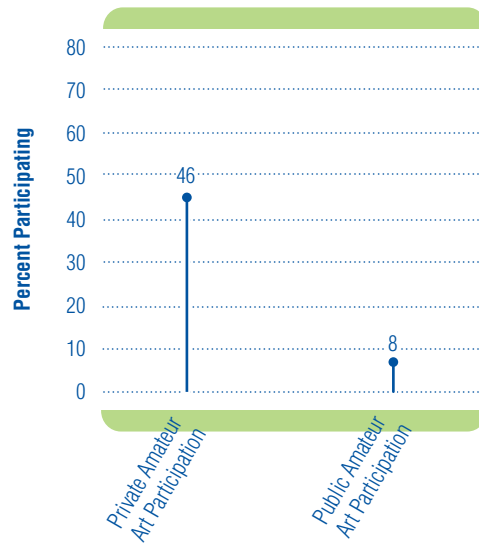
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## EXHIBIT 5

### AMATEUR ART-MAKING OR PERFORMANCE

#### Amateur Art-Making

Nearly half of those surveyed (46 percent) reported playing an instrument, painting, dancing, singing, writing, or working on crafts for themselves, friends, or family during the past year (see exhibit 5). Eight percent said they performed, wrote, created an object, or did some other artistic activity for a *public* exhibit or performance. Although relatively few people participated at the more intense level of public performance, all but a few of those who performed in public also did so privately.<sup>6</sup>



#### SOURCE

Urban Institute:  
1998 Cultural Participation Survey

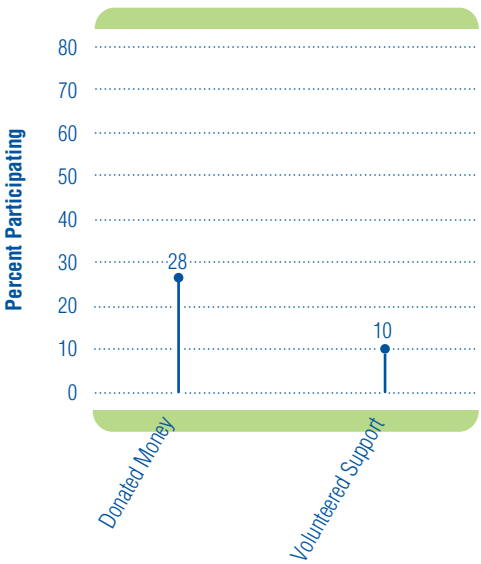
#### NOTE

Figures based on N of 2,406 from five communities.

<sup>6</sup> The survey first asked if people sang, played an instrument, danced, or did other activities in public, then asked if they did so in private. At least one common form of singing in public—as part of worship services—was evidently not considered as “public performance” by respondents.

**EXHIBIT 6**

**MONETARY AND VOLUNTEER SUPPORT  
FOR ARTS AND CULTURE**

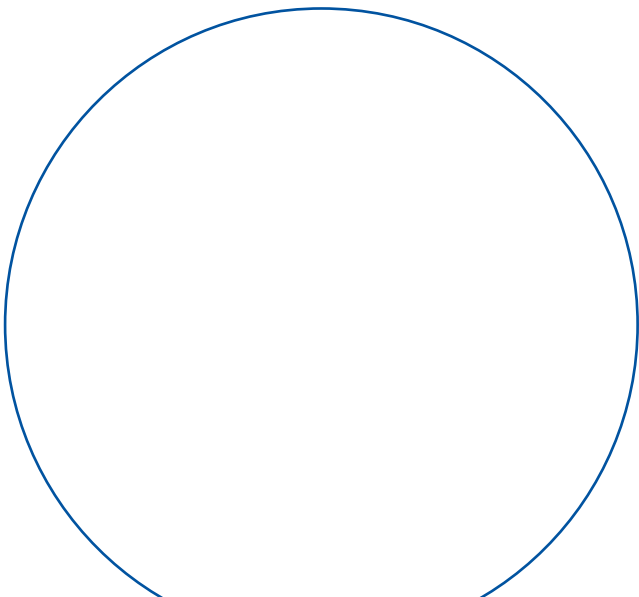


**SOURCE**  
Urban Institute:  
1998 Cultural Participation Survey

**NOTE**  
Figures based on N of 2,406 from five  
communities.

**Support for Artists or Arts  
Organizations**

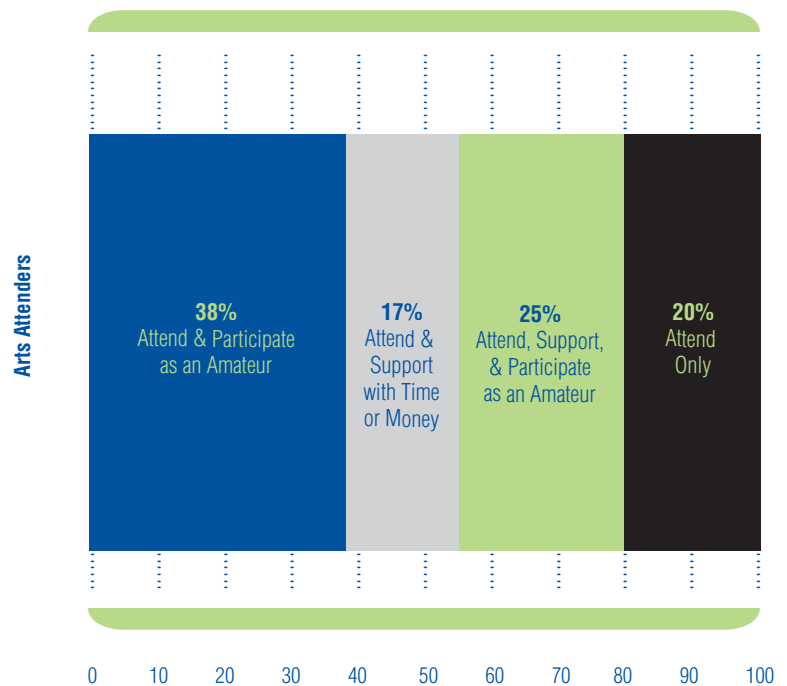
Twenty-eight percent of respondents had donated money, goods, or services to artists or organizations “involved in putting on arts performances or exhibits” in the past year (see exhibit 6), and 10 percent had volunteered to help in some way that did not involve performing (e.g., by helping to host or organize an event, or by working behind the scenes). Most of those who volunteered also donated money, but only 31 percent of those who donated took the extra step and volunteered.



Arts organizations can encourage, and take advantage of, overlaps among these four groups of participants by diversifying their outreach to any of the groups. Most people who attend live programs and events also participate in at least one other way. As exhibit 7 illustrates, 25 percent of arts and culture participants attended events, donated time or money, *and* did some kind of amateur art-making. Thirty-eight percent both attended events and engaged in amateur art-making, while 17 percent both attended and contributed time or money. Those who only attended arts programs or events totaled 20 percent of all participants. (Participants who reported taking their children to events or arranging lessons outside of school were not included in exhibit 7 or in this analysis, because adults with children are a subset of the overall group of participants.)

## EXHIBIT 7

**EIGHTY PERCENT OF THOSE WHO ATTEND LIVE PROGRAMS AND EVENTS ALSO PARTICIPATE IN ARTS AND CULTURE IN OTHER WAYS**



### SOURCE

Urban Institute:  
1998 Cultural Participation Survey

### NOTE

Figures based on N of 2,406 from five communities.

# “The Ladder of Commitment:” Arts Participation and Levels of Personal Engagement

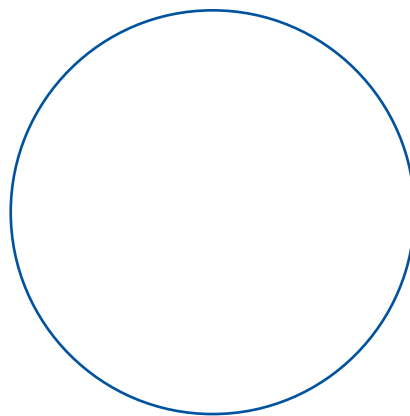
This research indicates the existence of a “ladder” of increasing intensity of commitment within the different types of participation. In other words, programs and events aimed at already-active participants are a promising way to increase cultural (and, by extension, civic) participation. The research provides supports for the following three strategies:

## I. Use attendance at performances and exhibits to encourage “first steps” up the ladder of personal commitment to arts and culture.

The largest numbers of people participate in ways that are the least demanding in terms of time, money, or skill, while much smaller numbers participate in the ways that are most demanding. For example, the average person is more likely to attend a program or event than to engage in amateur art-making; or, moving up the ladder, more likely to engage in amateur art-making than to support the arts by donating time or money. This pattern repeats within three of the types of participation studied. The average parent is more likely to take his or her child to an event than to arrange lessons outside of school. The average adult is more likely to engage in art-making privately than

publicly. People are more likely to donate money than to volunteer time in support of artists or arts organizations.

Survey results show that these differences in levels of personal commitment are linked to how often people attend programs and events. Those who attend events across the widest range of artistic styles, perform or exhibit their art in public (the most intense mode of involvement in art-making), volunteer time to help arts organizations and put on events (the most intense mode of supporting the arts), and ensure that their children get lessons in an art form (the most intense commitment to socializing one’s children to arts and culture) also attend more arts and cultural events than people whose involvement in the same participation mode is less intense.

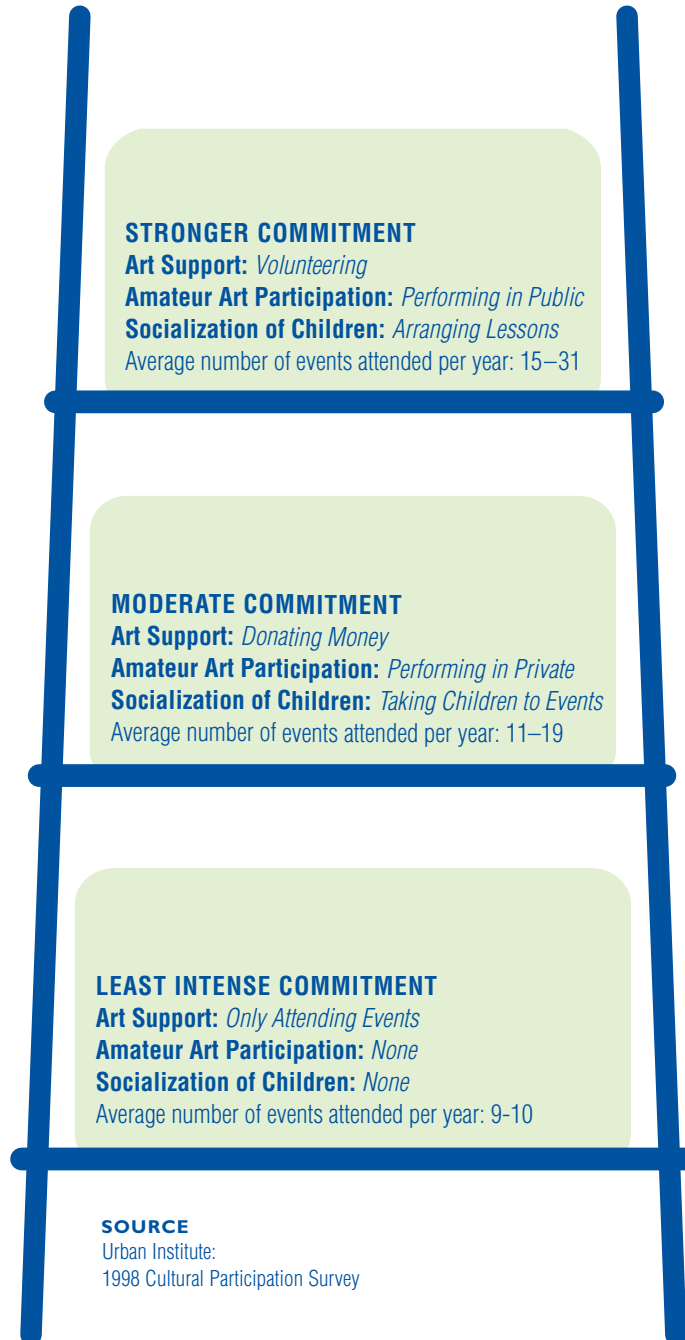


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## EXHIBIT 8

### LADDER OF INCREASING COMMITMENT

**Those With a Stronger Personal Commitment to  
Arts and Culture Attend More Arts and Cultural Events**





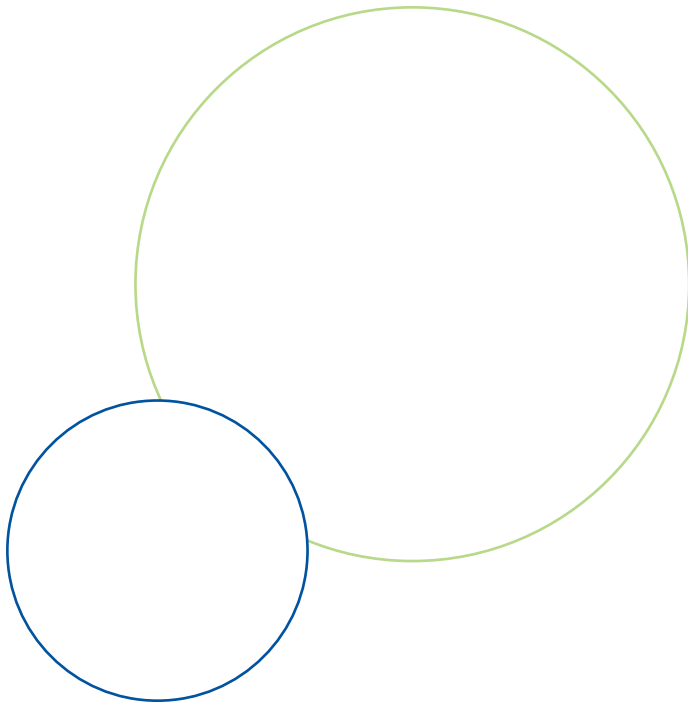
People who do not support arts and culture by donating time or money, do not engage in amateur art-making, and do not either take their children to arts and cultural events or arrange lessons for them attend fewer than 10 programs and events on average per year.

These findings suggest that people can be led up a ladder of commitment (see exhibit 8). Encouraging people to be more active in any form of cultural participation—for example, first getting adults to take children to events, then encouraging them to ensure that their children can take lessons if they want to—can promote more active participation in other ways, such as taking lessons along with their children.

**2. Use marketing to encourage already-active participants, particularly amateur art-makers, to increase their participation and strengthen their support.**

The most frequent attenders of arts and cultural programs and events are the small group of amateur art-makers who perform in public (attending on average 31 events or programs per

year), followed by the slightly larger group of supporters of arts supporters who volunteer their time (attending on average 23 events or programs per year). In contrast, people who do not support arts and culture by donating time or money, do not engage in amateur art-making, and do not either take their children to arts and cultural events or arrange lessons for them attend fewer than 10 programs and events on average per year. Those who attend the fewest events per year (five or fewer) are those who only attend a narrow range of artistic styles. Arts and cultural institutions can tap into and strengthen an important base of support by using targeted marketing and/or providing special incentives to these two key groups. For example, art museums can offer discount tickets for a special traveling exhibit to area art students, or professional theater companies might use the mailing lists of community and neighborhood theater groups.

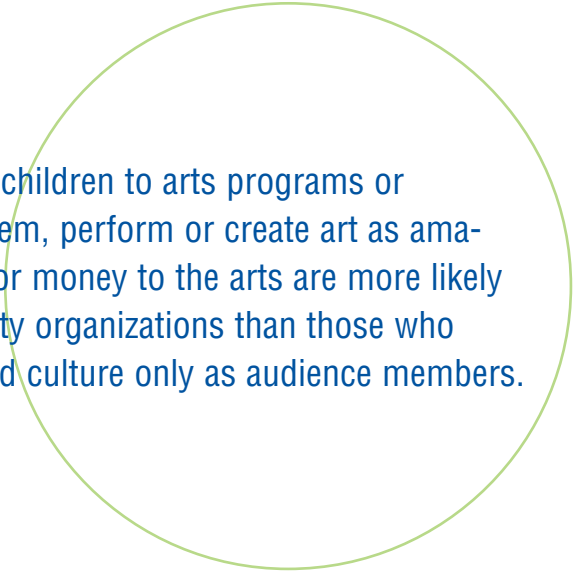


### **3. Provide opportunities for adults to engage in amateur art-making as a way to increase their children's exposure to arts and culture and build audiences for the long term.**

Adults who create or perform art (for themselves or for others) are the most likely to encourage their own children's participation in the arts. For example, an arts festival where adults and children can participate in making art, learn to play a new instrument, or practice new dance steps together not only encourages the adults' interest in arts and culture, but also has the potential to influence the

children's perception of the value and importance of arts and culture. Twenty-seven percent of parents surveyed who are not engaged in amateur art-making take their children to events or arrange lessons for them. That percentage rises to 39 percent among parents who make art privately and to 66 percent among those who do so publicly. This relationship matters to arts institutions because research has shown that children's exposure to the arts strongly affects the likelihood and frequency of their attendance at arts programs and events as adults.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Paul DiMaggio and Francie Ostrower. 1992. *Race, Ethnicity and Participation in the Arts*. Research Division Report No. 25. Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts.



People who take their children to arts programs or arrange lessons for them, perform or create art as amateurs, or donate time or money to the arts are more likely to belong to community organizations than those who are involved in arts and culture only as audience members.

### **Arts Participation and Community Participation**

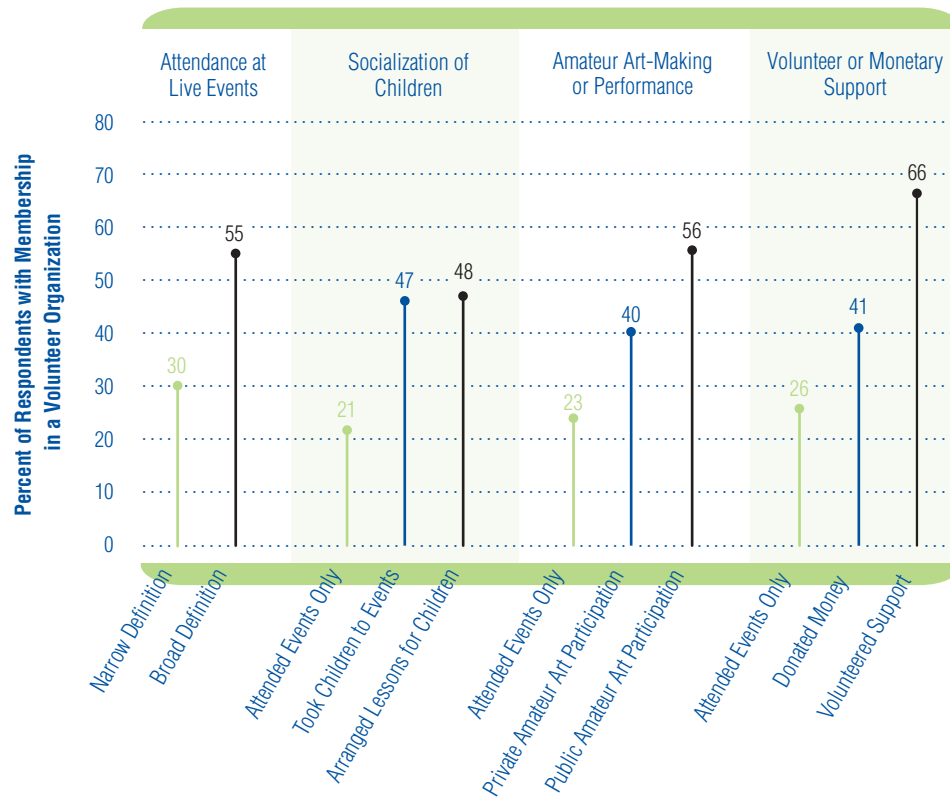
For arts and cultural providers and supporters, this research argues for efforts to encourage more active participation in the arts by appealing to people who already participate in any of the four ways discussed here—to encourage their movement up the ladder of commitment. But providers would also do well to appeal to those who participate in civic life through religious, political, or community organizations.

**Arts organizations that make connections to community, civic, and religious organizations can gain access to a pool of participants already active in other forms of community life.**

Participants in arts and culture tend to be active in community life. This fact was documented in an earlier publication in this CPCP evaluation series, *Reggae to Rachmaninoff: How and Why People Participate in Arts and Culture*, which found that increased attendance at arts and cultural programs and events is linked to increased attendance at religious services and higher levels of volunteerism, membership in volunteer organizations, and voting. This connection holds for other forms of arts and cultural participation as well: the more people take up roles as supporters, socializers, and amateur art creators, the more likely they are to participate in a range of civic and religious activities. People who take their children to arts and cultural programs or arrange lessons for them, perform or create art as amateurs, or donate time or money to arts and culture are more likely to belong to

## EXHIBIT 9

**THE STRONGER THE PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO ARTS AND CULTURE, THE MORE LIKELY TO BELONG TO A VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION**

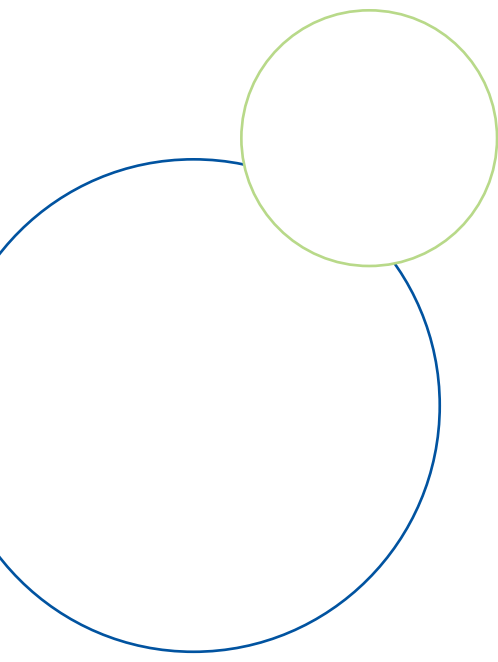


### SOURCE

Urban Institute:  
1998 Cultural Participation Survey

### NOTE

Figures based on N of 2,406 from five communities.



community organizations than those who are involved in arts and culture only as audience members<sup>8</sup> (see exhibit 9). For example, exhibit 9 shows that 56 percent of those who participated as amateurs *in public* belonged to a volunteer organization, 40 percent of those who participated as amateurs *in private*, and just 23 percent of those who attended arts and cultural events—but did not participate as amateurs—had also joined volunteer organizations. Membership in a neighborhood organization may lead people to volunteer at an arts or cultural program or event that the organization sponsors. Indeed, organizational membership almost guarantees participation at sponsored programs and events.<sup>9</sup>

**Appeals to civic-mindedness appear to be one way for arts organizations to encourage more active participation in arts and cultural programs and events.**

Adults who participate in arts and culture beyond simply attending programs and events are more likely than others to say that “support for

organizations or events important in the community” is a major reason for their attendance at arts and cultural events. This underlying commitment to community helps explain why research shows that participation in the arts is related to participation in other forms of religious or civic life.

### **Broadening the Vision**

The late John Gardner, prominent scholar and author, argued that leaders from all segments of society must accept a larger mission and “recognize that one of the great functions of leaders is to help a society to achieve the best that is in it.”<sup>10</sup> The CPCP research argues for exactly that kind of broader vision among arts and cultural institutions about the value of their work and for assuming more of a leadership role within communities for the benefit of all. Community and civic leaders alike need to recognize the powerful link between arts and cultural participation and the quality of life within their communities.

<sup>8</sup> These relationships between arts participation and civic participation hold true even after accounting for the fact that those who attend events frequently are most likely to participate in community organizations.

<sup>9</sup> Walker and Scott-Melnik, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> John Gardner. 1961. *Excellence, Can We be Equal and Excellent Too?* New York: Harpers. p. 126.

## COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS PARTICIPATING IN CPCP

The Boston Foundation  
Community Foundation Silicon Valley  
Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan  
Dade Community Foundation  
East Tennessee Foundation  
Greater Kansas City Community Foundation  
Humboldt Area Foundation  
Maine Community Foundation  
New Hampshire Charitable Foundation  
San Francisco Foundation

## EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS FOR CPCP INITIATIVE

In January 1998, The Wallace Foundation commissioned the Urban Institute to conduct a five-year evaluation of the CPCP initiative. The initiative is part of the Foundation's long-term commitment to support a range of cultural organizations and private and public arts funders to enhance broad participation and to make the arts and culture an active part of people's everyday lives. This policy paper is one of a number of publications from the study, including: *Reggae to Rachmaninoff: How and Why People Participate in Arts and Culture*; *Cultural Collaborations: Building Partnerships for Arts Participation*; and *Arts and Culture: Community Connections*. Further publications are planned exploring the policy and practice implications for building arts participation based on the CPCP evaluation.

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The Wallace Foundation seeks to create opportunities for people to enrich themselves through better schools, enhanced community activities, and participation in the arts. Using a range of strategies over the past decade, the Foundation has worked to propel the development of cultural organizations that are effectively increasing participation in their communities; to foster partnerships with states and other public and private funders to increase arts participation; and to develop new knowledge and tools that help make the arts part of people's everyday lives.

#### **Arts4AllPeople**

A web community for those committed to building participation in the arts.

Visit: [www.arts4allpeople.org](http://www.arts4allpeople.org)

#### **The Wallace Foundation**

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