

**A special outline of key elements drawn from the original publication  
*Growing AUDIENCES/Creating Value, Meaning and Energy***

**By Nello McDaniel and George Thorn  
ARTS Action Research**

The complete publication *Growing AUDIENCES/Creating Value, Meaning and Energy* can be obtained from ARTS Action Research by going to our website [www.artsaction.com](http://www.artsaction.com) and clicking on publications. You will find other helpful AAR publications listed there as well.

Nello McDaniel  
ARTS Action Research

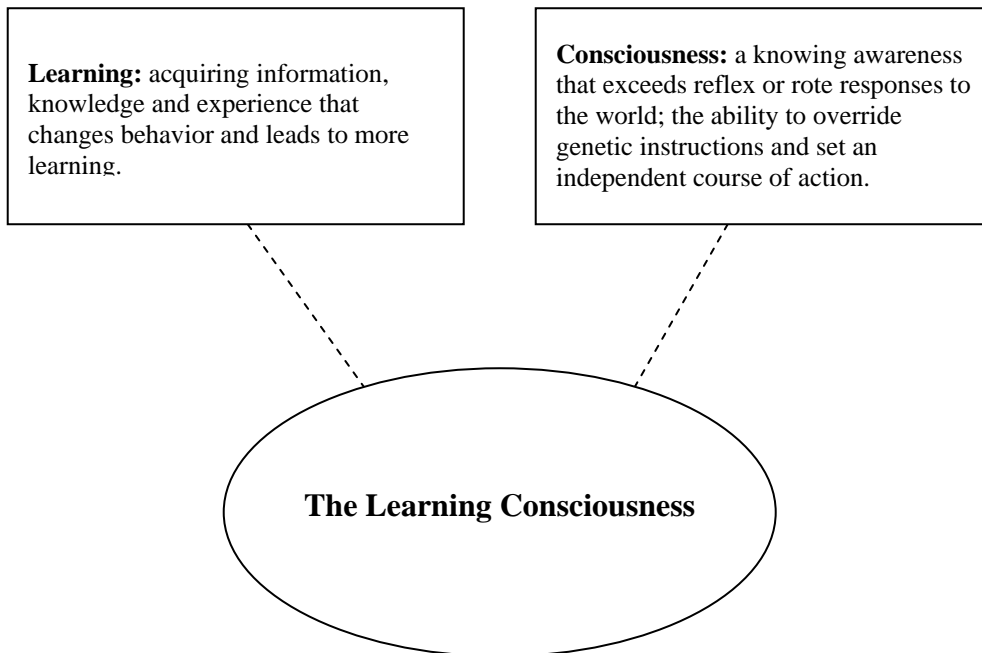
**ARTS Action Research's Beliefs and Approach**

AAR believes that building and growing arts participation is a whole organizational *process* and much more than a goal, a single project or something that marketing or outreach departments do. Building and growing arts participation requires a real commitment to personal, organizational and audience change and growth.

When we refer to building and growing arts participation, we mean: *deepening* involvement by those who already participate in the arts in some fashion; *broadening* involvement to include those who, for whatever reasons, participate minimally or not at all; and *diversifying* participation. Diversifying means first: diversifying the experiences of those already engaged so they may experience and enjoy a greater range of arts expression and content; and second: diversifying with the hope of becoming as inclusive and representative of a given community's culture, age, race and ethnicity as possible.

We believe that the individual arts provider (producer, presenter, exhibitor) is the central player in growing and building arts participation in any community. The range of arts participants – active and potential – in each community is important. Understanding what motivates or prevents someone from participating in the arts is vital. But the key leveraging agent in changing arts participation behaviors in a community is the individual arts provider. *And* it is our belief and experience that any arts provider's efforts to build

participation and change community behaviors must extend from a *learning consciousness*. That is, any arts provider committed to changing the behaviors of those in the community must be prepared to first change her/his own behavior. Changing behaviors is a function of *learning* and *conscious* effort. By definition, learning is the process of acquiring knowledge, information and experience that changes behavior. And consciousness is the way humans override force of habit and rote responses to chart a different course.



### **Growing Audiences/Some Processes and Key Indicators**

AAR's approach employs a set of key indicators to help frame questions and responses regarding an organization's processes of building and growing arts participation. These indicators serve a dual function in assisting with the planning sequence *and* as a diagnostic tool to identify the source of problems in planning and/or implementation. While AAR has a point of view underpinning all of these indicators, we don't expect every arts provider to adopt our specific point of view or approach; but each needs to address the indicators in a deliberate and meaningful fashion. The key indicators are

outlined and described in the next three sections: I. Key Organizational Indicators; II. A Relational Framework; and, III. Steps in a Process Cycle.

## **I. KEY ORGANIZAZATIONAL INDICATORS**

**Is Leadership *Leading*?** Professional leadership must be committed personally, professionally and organizationally to building arts participation. Professional leadership must demonstrate a real and direct commitment to not only making, presenting or exhibiting art, but in helping all in the organization make meaningful connections with audiences. This critical leadership role cannot be delegated to marketing or outreach staff.

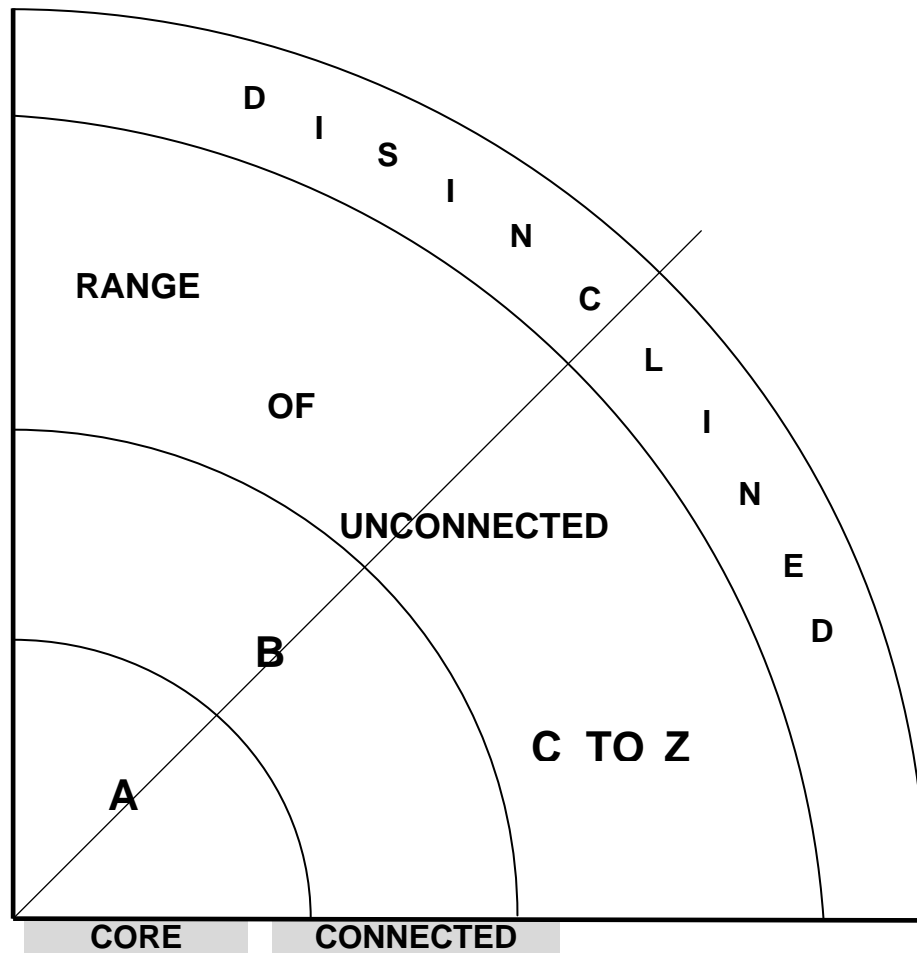
**Are Value's Clear?** Changing audience and arts participation behaviors comes from each arts provider's commitment to audience and community as a fundamental part of their beliefs and values. There's no such thing as organizational values — only the personal values of the leadership and of those within the organization who share them. These values must be expressed, articulated, written and shared internally and externally.

**Are Programs and Projects *Meaningful*?** Arts providers expecting to increase and enhance arts participation must maintain a commitment to their artistic vision and mission and to high quality and integrity in the work being provided. Arts participation cannot be built and sustained by any set of tools, techniques or process if the work doesn't merit sustained engagement.

**Is there a Commitment to Quality Relationships?** If you are committed to deepening, broadening and diversifying arts participation, this means deliberate changes in your external relationships. But the process begins at home. It is impossible for you to have a quality relationship *externally* that you are incapable of having *internally*. It is impossible to express and act on values within the community that are not being expressed and acted upon internally. The quality, commitment and process of building relationships on the organizational level will be reflected, for better or worse, within the community.

## II. A RELATIONAL FRAMEWORK

**Do You Know Who Your Audience Is; and Isn't?** Each arts provider must begin with understanding existing audience and participation relationships. Certain relationships are critical to ongoing stability and viability. Other relationships are more transient and function within the time and space of a given project. And some relationships aren't meant to be. *No arts provider can be meaningful to all.* If you attempt to be, you may end up being meaningful to none.



There is a range of relationships that every arts provider has in its community of existing and potential audiences. We characterize these as the *core*, the *connected*, the *unconnected* and the *disinclined*. Every arts provider has a *core audience* (A in the diagram). The *core* includes those who attend your events on a regular basis because they

are personally committed to you, your work, your programming or perhaps your aesthetic or curatorial point of view. The *connected* (**B** in the diagram) are those who attend arts events but aren't necessarily committed to any one arts provider. They shop around and seek out the performances, exhibits, or events that are most meaningful and that they are most likely to enjoy. For those in the *unconnected* range (**C** to **Z** in the diagram), arts participation is not an active part of their lives or consciousness – at least as far as we know. It is likely that they are participating in some cultural activities, but not that we are readily aware of. They are not “anti-art.” Rather, their participation in arts activities as avocation or as an audience member may not be a significant part of their lives. There is a fourth range: the *disinclined*. The *disinclined* are “anti-art” due to philosophical, political or religious beliefs.

### **The Relational Landscape/Variables and Values**

*Key Premise: All individuals in a community are potential arts participants. If an arts activity is meaningful enough in terms of relationships and/or arts content all potential arts participants may become actual arts participants.*

Central to making an arts activity meaningful is the *relationship* between the arts provider and arts participant and the *arts content*. In both cases, the operative term is *meanings* or what is *meaningful*.

### **What is Meaningful?**

Meanings might be thought of as the sum of one's life interactions and experience, constantly growing, evolving and mutating within the framework of day-to-day living. And relevant to this purpose are the meanings of *relationships* and *arts content*.

**Relationships.** Any relationship between you, the arts provider, and an arts participant is singularly meaningful. These relationships may be personal, institutional, or surreptitious, depending upon the arts activity, or a simple affinity depending upon a particular event.

**Arts Content.** Arts content is meaningful in that it relates to an arts activity's form, ideas, style and aesthetic. Arts content must relate directly to arts participants on a *personal*, *cultural* or *defining experience* level to be meaningful

### ***Energy = A Measure of Meanings***

There are degrees of what is meaningful and why. The deeper the meanings of a given arts activity, and the more ways it is meaningful in terms of *relationships* and *arts content*, the more significant. The more significant the meanings, the higher the participant's *energy*, or interest and motivation toward participating in an arts activity, becomes. Increasing the likelihood of participation through intensifying arts participants' *energy* is a more effective and efficient use of resources than attempting to compete with the myriad forces in the marketplace.

### ***Energy Dampers***

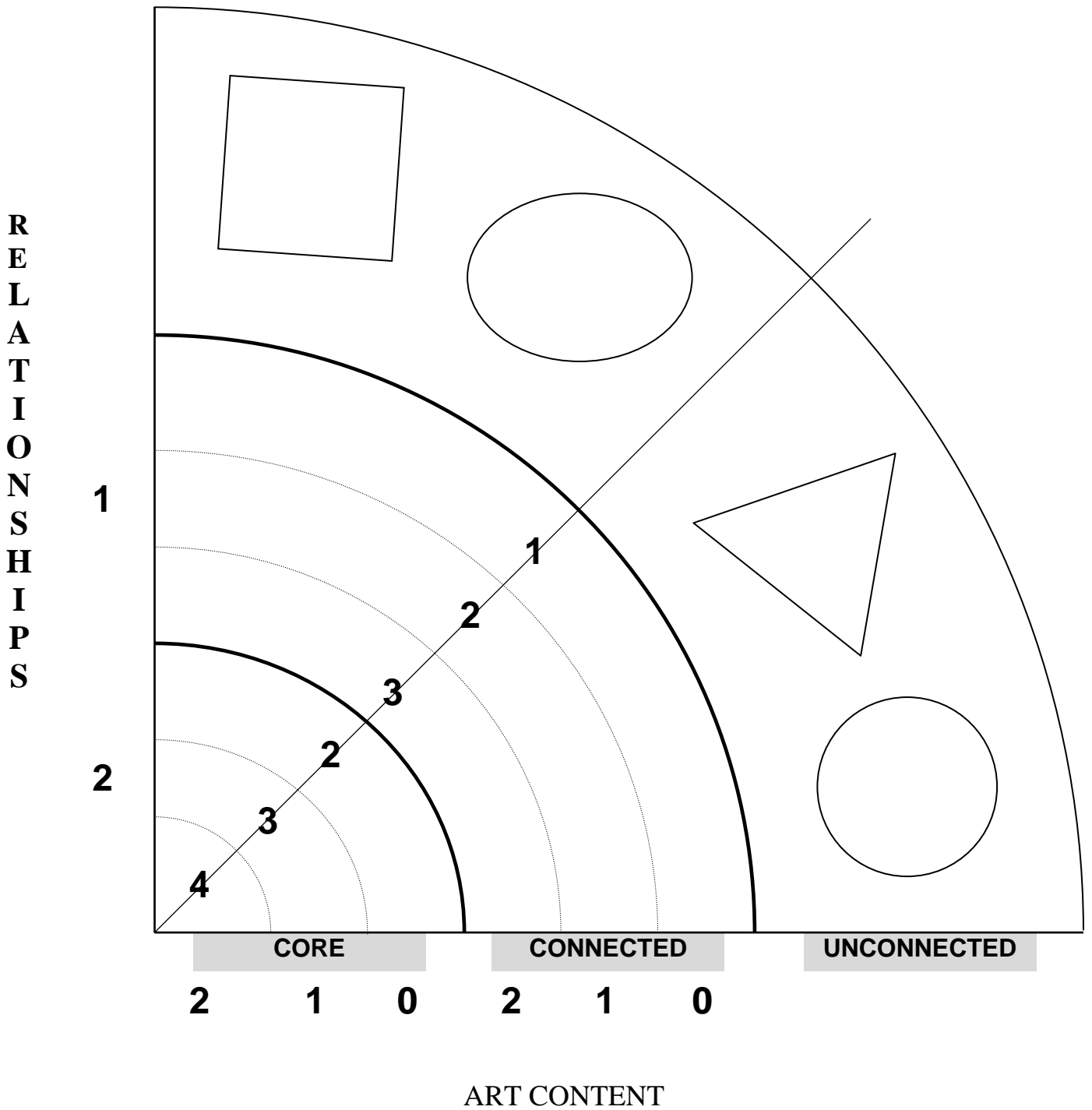
There are factors constantly working against your efforts and arts participants' energy:

- *Noise* includes all other arts, entertainment or leisure options and general info-clutter. It includes communication problems.
- *Frustration* includes efforts to gain access, complications of time and schedule, weather or a variety of fears associated with a given activity.
- *Inertia* includes numerous day-to-day personal responsibilities that claim greater time or energy than an arts activity. It may include unwillingness to travel.
- *Discomfort* relates to work that is perceived to be uncomfortable or may be outside of the "comfort zone" of an arts participant.

Low levels of participant energy result in less likelihood of arts participation, certainly less frequency and less predictability. Low-energy participants may be more easily overwhelmed by noise, frustration, inertia and discomfort. Even high levels of energy may be diminished or cancelled out by these dampers.

### **The Relational Landscape Map**

The gradations and energy values of arts participants' behaviors on the relational landscape map is a way of broadly describing your audience in terms of meanings. The relational landscape suggests gradations within the *core*, the *connected* and the *unconnected* and associates energy values to the various relationships and arts content.



Arts participants in the *core* are assigned a standing energy value of 2, the *connected* a standing energy value of 1, the *unconnected* 0. Arts content is valued within both the *core* and *connected* as 2 for high energy, 1 for medium and 0 for no energy. There is no value assigned to arts content in the *unconnected* range.

### **III. STEPS IN A PROCESS CYCLE**

#### ***1. The Alpha Map/Standing Properties***

Begin by developing an audience map of standing or existing values. This initial or *alpha* map approximates and describes existing audience relationships and energy values (particularly of the *core* and *connected* audiences).

You are the expert about your own audience and, at a given time, can characterize the audience in terms of standing *core*, *connected* and *unconnected* energy values. Maybe the core is 15 people (5 hard core, 5 solid and 5 variable) and maybe it's 1500 (100 hard core, 400 solid and 1,000 variable). You can approximately describe the relative energy levels of your audience in terms of gradations of *core*, *connected* and those in the *unconnected* with whom you would like to engage.

#### ***2. Develop Your Project and Focus***

Arts projects (a season, series, event, exhibition, et al) must extend from each arts provider's articulated artistic, philosophic, aesthetic or curatorial point of view. Projects may be conceived or developed with certain audiences, communities or participation opportunities in mind; but they must be a true extension of the arts provider's vision, mission and core values. Before a project can be made meaningful externally, it must be clear and meaningful internally.

#### ***3. Set Goals/Test Assumptions***

Based on the *alpha map*, outline goals for your *core*, *connected* and *unconnected* audiences as they relate to the arts project. How do you want to use your project to grow and build the standing values of *core* and *connected* audiences? What are the goals or possibilities for various *unconnected* audiences? Are there aspects of the project that will challenge the *core* and/or *connected* and dampen energy?

#### ***4. Develop Strategies and Tactics***

It is more feasible to increase audience connection and energies based on appropriate meanings than attempt to overwhelm the marketplace with advertising. If there is clarity in whom our audience is, who we want to reach and our goals, and then every season/project suggests appropriate strategies, partnerships and tactics. There are also opportunities (themes or topics) that may open doors to new participation. Strategies and tactics for the *core*, *connected* and *unconnected* vary because of the corresponding

differences in relationships and access. But in each case, the strategies will revolve around

- (a) relationships and partnerships
- (b) communication and information dissemination
- (c) design and use of special activities, intersections and site connections

### ***5. The Organizational Equation/Balancing Resources***

No arts provider can be creative, productive or proactive if in debt, in crisis or if human resources are overextended. For each arts provider and each project there is an equation that defines the balance between what it wants to do programmatically and toward building arts participation and the resources (human, financial, space and time) available to do it. The most successful project in terms of meeting goals is ultimately self-defeating if the arts provider's staff and board are exhausted and unable to maintain commitment and work continuity.

### ***6. Implement and Assess***

In spite of the best laid plans, bad things happen to good arts projects and arts providers. Accept the fact that the best plans never work out exactly – nor should they. Sometimes, great surprises occur that you couldn't have planned for. The important thing is that you have a process for making a new plan regardless of what happens. And, *assess* at the beginning, middle and end. As learning is to a person (acquiring knowledge, information and experience that changes behavior) we believe that assessment is to an organization. Assessment is how an arts organization learns and changes behaviors.

At the conclusion of your project, develop a post-activity *Omega Map* outlining the emergent properties of the audience that responded. *Emergent properties* are the characteristics of each audience grouping and their responses as a function of both *relationships* and *arts content*. We might say that emergent properties are a way to understand and assess audience energy and responses to a specific project and from project to project.

# Relational Landscape Map

