



JANUARY  
16-17TH

*HowlRound*

2015

A Community-Powered Movement of Theater Practitioners

# TRIPLE PLAY CONVENING

Last winter, Triple Play convened members of the theater community in six cities (New York, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Minneapolis, Los Angeles, and San Francisco) and reviewed research revolving around the subject, including two new inquiries commissioned by this project. In our travels, we heard innovative ideas from artists and theatermakers in every city we visited—**ideas about *when to engage an audience for a given show (months in advance, right before, right after) and how to do it (on site, off site).*** Every play has a different “right” audience and playwrights should and can be a critical part of the effort to reach that audience. Theaters have very different ideas about community and how they interact with it. These differences lead to a host of engagement strategies that have seen varying degrees of success.

It was exciting to enter into these conversations. Each community we visited is invested in this work. Playwrights are eager to engage in building audiences and theaters have demonstrated a willingness to examine their own institutional practices and welcome writers and audiences to affect change. As the next step, this fall, in conjunction with new play productions across the country, Triple Play is conducting structured qualitative research to bring the audience into the conversation.

The “action research” approach taken here models the behavior we hope to encourage—direct interaction between playwrights, theater representatives, and audiences. In each of the six cities, playwrights and theater representatives are alternating roles interviewing audience members and acting as observers. Playwrights are conducting one-on-one interviews with single ticket buyers for new plays while theater reps observe and theater representatives are moderating focus groups of attendees to a new play while the playwrights observe. **Do the observations, feelings, hopes, and aspirations of audiences match the perceptions of theater leaders, marketing directors, and playwrights?**

Nationwide, interviews are following the same protocol, designed by the renowned researchers at WolfBrown. Come January 2015, Triple Play is partnering with HowlRound: A Center for the Theater Commons at Emerson College to bring authentic voices from the three intertwined parties (audience, artist, institution) to an in-person gathering in Boston to explore ideas about **how to be better at finding the “right” audience for a given work, how to move the theater more robustly into a community’s consciousness, and how to increase appetite for risk.**

### **Phase I: Community Conversations**

*These conversations were held with theater professionals in the Winter and Spring 2014.*

- **Cities visited:** Chicago, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, New York City, San Francisco, Washington, D.C.
- **Theater professionals engaged:** approximately 250

### **Phase II: Audience Conversations**

*Held throughout Fall 2014, these conversations unite theater administrators and professional playwrights in conversations with local audience members about why they do and/or do not see new plays.*

- **Theater partners:** Arena Stage (Washington, D.C.), Center Theatre Group (Los Angeles), Cutting Ball (San Francisco), Dog and Pony (Washington, D.C.), East West Players (Los Angeles), Goodman Theatre (Chicago), Playwrights Horizons (New York City), The Public Theater (New York City), Woolly Mammoth (Washington, D.C.)
- **Playwright partners:** Madeleine George, Nicole Jost, Jaqueline Lawton, Mona Mansour, Ken Narasaki, Dan O'Brien, Andrew Saito, Nilaja Sun, Martin Zimmerman

### **Phase III: Convening**

*Held in January 2015 in partnership with HowlRound: A Center for the Theater Commons in Boston, this convening will unite artists, administrators, audience members, and other theater professionals to share and discuss findings and develop strategies for how to implement for what's been learned.*

- **Convening Partners:** HowlRound: A Center for the Theater Commons at Emerson College, WolfBrown (Alan Brown & John Carnwath), Zannie Voss, Professors and Chair of Arts Management, SMU