**MAKING THE CASE FOR ACCESSIBILITY**

*Suzanne Connor, Sr. Program Officer – Arts & Culture*

**Knocking on the right doors:**

* Disabled artists/patrons are part of the “diversity” spectrum for most funders
* Audience retention is a common problem supported by funders
* Almost half of arts audiences are over 55; much more for classical arts
* Older patrons are more likely to be subscribers and donors
* Acquiring disabilities through age means they are less likely to have coping and advocacy skills; more likely to get frustrated or embarrassed and stop coming
* It is much easier to accommodate and retain the core audience than to attract new ones; millennials tend to be less loyal and more spontaneous
* Documenting disabilities can be challenging if people don’t self-identify
* 70% of philanthropic giving comes from individuals who love the work

**Getting your foot in the door:**

* Demonstrate your organization’s commitment and track record
* Articulate your point of difference
* Avoid fluff and superlatives; just the facts

**Design a clear and measurable project:**

* Begin with the end in mind
* Define SMART outcomes
* What will success look like? Commit to target #s

**Customer service is the key, so LISTEN TO THE CUSTOMER:**

* Every venue and art experience has unique challenges
* Professional focus groups
* Listening luncheons with existing patrons
* Well-crafted surveys with incentives
* Experiments and prototypes
* Try, listen, evaluate, try again

Over my 14 years at the Arts & Business Council and the Chicago Community Trust, I have attended hundreds of arts events at venues throughout the region. Here are some of the comments I have heard:

“None of us likes to drive at night anymore and the CTA isn’t safe, so we just decided that we’ll only go to the show if there’s a matinee.”

“I like to take my mother to the symphony but no way could she make it to and from the parking garage. There’s no good place for her to wait inside alone while I bring the car around, so we can only go if there’s another person with us.”

I love going there because they have $4 valet service!”

“Their parking lot is very well-lit, but if you get off the bus at the corner, it’s the darkest half-block in the City. I can’t believe they can’t add exterior lighting or get another street light or something.”

“It’s way too dark to read the program in the theater, even before the house lights go down. They need more light or larger print.”

“My parents are getting good with their tablet when I send photos of the grandkids, so it would make sense to put the audio tours on an app instead of another device with uncomfortable headphones.”

“I hate it when the ushers aren’t friendly because I can’t read the little numbers on the seats.”

“We don’t have the energy to wander all over the museum looking for the right room, but most of the time, there’s only a security guard at the door and they aren’t very helpful with directions.”

“I had no idea there was a small private rest room on this level that a disabled person could use. My grandmother stopped coming here because she couldn’t make it to the ladies room and back during intermission with her cane.”

“I used to like going to little storefront theatres, but I hesitate now because sometimes the sound is very loud, especially if the house isn’t full. It just gives me a headache.”

“It seems like they only have online ticketing. I just couldn’t get a real person on the phone, so I gave up. I know live help is expensive, but it seems like the answering message could at least give you a time period to call when a person would be there.”

“I can’t find the run time on the website, so we don’t know what time to pick my parents up at the <venue>. Sometimes you can sit out there, but sometimes the police tell you to move.”