

— ARTS AND CULTURE —  
THE INTERSECTION OF RESEARCH AND POLICY

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Additional support was provided by Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art. The mission of Crystal Bridges is to welcome all to celebrate the American spirit in a setting that unites the power of art with the beauty of nature. Situated on 120 wooded acres in Bentonville, Arkansas, Crystal Bridges was founded in 2005 by the Walton Family Foundation as a nonprofit charitable organization for all to enjoy. Crystal Bridges' growing collection spans five centuries of American masterworks from the Colonial era to the current day. Since its opening, the Museum has welcomed more than one million visitors and garnered more than 7,900 households in its membership. Annually, more than 30,000 schoolchildren visit the Museum as part of the Willard and Pat Walker School Visit Program, and nearly 700 volunteers provide more than 24,000 hours of service.





A photograph of the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, a modern building with a curved, glass-enclosed upper level and a dark, sloped roof. It is situated on a hillside overlooking a body of water, with lush green trees in the background.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April 2014, more than 40 policymakers, advocates, philanthropists, researchers, and practitioners involved in the arts convened at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art. Their task, broadly defined, was to apply their collective wisdom in an attempt to remedy persisting problems that exist within arts-based research and policy.

Generally speaking, there is a lack of rigorous and policy-relevant research about the benefits of arts and cultural activities. Without quality research, the arts are at a disadvantage in the policy realm. In a policy environment increasingly driven by data and rigorous analytic techniques, unmeasured and understudied policy areas face the risk of being marginalized for failure to demonstrate their value.

What explains the lack of rigorous research? What can be done to remedy it? And if better research was conducted, would it make a difference in the policy arena? These and related questions guided the discussions among these experts over the two-day symposium.

The key recommendations and takeaways from the event are summarized in the following points:

- 1 The field could be strengthened by building a formal network that connects researchers across the various disciplinary approaches from which they currently operate. This will aid in the regular sharing of research, create opportunities for collaboration, and strengthen the cohesion of the field.
- 2 Public policy schools need to devote attention to arts and cultural policy and encourage scholars who are interested in pursuing this line of research.
- 3 A new generation of researchers needs to be developed and trained to contribute to the research network.

Perhaps with the right buy-in from policy schools, this training can be explicit, rather than a by-product of general policy training programs.

- 4 Better venues for publication of significant policy-related research in the arts need to be developed, or existing policy journals need to be leveraged to publish the types of research that can move the field forward.
- 5 Researchers must engage multiple audiences using different approaches. In addition to publishing in peer-reviewed academic outlets, this includes writing popular media pieces and actively sharing their work with policymakers and practitioners.
- 6 The field needs ongoing support from arts patrons and government agencies. It is possible that demonstrating the effectiveness of rigorous research from some initial studies will motivate patrons and policymakers to increase their support for effective research.

The task at hand is a difficult one—if it were easy, it would have been done long ago. The symposium at Crystal Bridges might well serve as a starting point for the type of networking and field-building the community desperately needs. There seems to be a small but growing number of researchers interested in conducting this type of work, and bringing a substantial sample of those interested together to begin a dialogue was clearly a step in the right direction.







# INTRODUCTION

In April 2014, more than 40 policymakers, advocates, philanthropists, researchers, and practitioners involved in the arts convened at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art. Their task, broadly defined, was to apply their collective wisdom in an attempt to remedy persisting problems that exist between arts-based research and policy.

In attendance were representatives from leading institutions involved in arts policy and advocacy, including the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the National Art Education Association, the Association of Art Museum Directors, the Arts Education Partnership, and Americans for the Arts. Also in attendance were leading foundations that support the arts, including First Quality Enterprises, the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, the Windgate Foundation, the Thea Foundation, and the Walton Family Foundation. Representatives from an array of art museums and cultural organizations also attended, representing the National Gallery of Art, The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Vizcaya Museum and Gardens, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and the Walton Arts Center for the Performing Arts. Private research firms involved in evaluations of the arts and cultural institutions were represented by members of Slover-Linett

Audience Research, Randi Korn and Associates, and the RAND Corporation. Finally, academics involved in arts-based research were in attendance from Harvard University, Indiana University, George Mason University, the University of Chicago, Southern Methodist University, the University of Washington, and the University of Arkansas.<sup>1</sup>

The opportunity to gather with a diverse group of policymakers, advocates, practitioners, and social scientists to focus on persistent problems in the field was unique. Most in attendance had never participated in an event that brought together expertise from these various fields. The challenges facing the arts in terms of research and policy were common and known to all involved, but also unique in terms of the implications, challenges, and potential solutions attendees brought to the experience.

The problems are well known. There is a lack of rigorous and policy-relevant research about the benefits of arts and cultural activities. Without quality research, the arts

are at a disadvantage in the policy realm. In a policy environment increasingly driven by data and rigorous analytic techniques, unmeasured and understudied policy areas face the risk of being marginalized for failure to demonstrate their value. What explains the lack of rigorous research? What can be done to remedy it? And if better research was conducted, would it make a difference in the policy arena? These and related questions guided the discussions among these experts over the two-day symposium.



<sup>1</sup> See the Appendix for a full list of symposium participants.





# MOTIVATION

Crystal Bridges has become known for having an ambitious vision, as evidenced by its world-class collection, integration of its architecture into the natural landscape, and unique programming. In addition to advancing scholarly research in art history through its exhibitions, collection, and the Tyson Scholars of American Art program, Crystal Bridges has played a role in advancing scholarly research in arts education and the role that cultural institutions play in student learning.

Shortly after the museum's opening in November 2011, researchers at the University of Arkansas partnered with the museum to conduct a rigorous study measuring the effects of student visits to an art museum. While numerous studies have claimed a broad range of benefits as a result of arts exposure, little research has been able to demonstrate the causal effects art museums and the visual arts have on student learning and development.

The opening of Crystal Bridges presented an especially rare opportunity to learn about the effects of student visits to an art museum. Because the school tours were being offered for free, in an area where most children had very little prior exposure to an art museum of Crystal Bridges' magnitude, demand for visits far exceeded available slots. In the first year alone, the museum received applications from 525 school groups requesting tours for more than 38,000 students. As a result, a random lottery was established as a fair way to award school tours. This also created the opportunity to conduct an experimental evaluation of the effects of the school tours, with randomly assigned treatment and control groups. With the random assignment of school tours, the treatment and control groups were, on average, identical in their pre-existing characteristics. As a result, any observed difference in outcomes between the treatment and control groups can be attributed to the impact of the museum visit.

In total, nearly 11,000 students participated in the study, roughly half of whom visited the museum in the first year while the other half had their tours deferred until after data collection. Based upon careful consideration of the museum's educational approach and the student-driven nature of the tours, the research team designed instruments and collected data to measure

the hypothesized outcomes identified by the museum educators.<sup>2</sup>

The research found that students who had visited the museum demonstrated stronger critical thinking skills when analyzing a work of art,<sup>3</sup> displayed higher levels of social tolerance, exhibited greater historical empathy,<sup>4</sup> and developed a taste for art museums and cultural institutions.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, most of the benefits were significantly larger for minority students, low-income students, and students from rural schools—typically two to three times larger than for white, middle-class, suburban students.

At the same time, the implementation and dissemination of the research study brought to light a number of concerns. In general, very little rigorous research on the effects of the arts and art museums had been conducted previously. This was surprising considering museums are visited by millions of students each year, and they spend billions of dollars annually providing educational services. Moreover, the lack of rigorous research is a well-known problem amongst many museum practitioners. The need for rigorous outcome-based research was articulated in an IMLS-published essay by the late Stephen E. Weil in 2000, who noted that it is increasingly the case that museums must “demonstrate [their] competence and render a positive account

<sup>2</sup> Anne Kraybill, “Inside the Black Box: What Happens on a One-Time Field Trip?” *Journal of Museum Education*, 39(3) (2014):302-11. <sup>3</sup> Daniel H. Bowen, Jay P. Greene, and Brian Kisida, “Learning to Think Critically: A Visual Art Experiment,” *Educational Researcher*, 43(1) (2014):37-44. <sup>4</sup> Jay P. Greene, Brian Kisida, and Daniel H. Bowen, “The Educational Value of Field Trips,” *Education Next*, 14(1) (2014):78-86. <sup>5</sup> Brian Kisida, Jay P. Greene, and Daniel H. Bowen, “Creating Cultural Consumers: The Dynamics of Cultural Capital Acquisition,” *Sociology of Education*, 87(4) (2014): 281-295.

of [their] achievements” or they run the risk of becoming irrelevant.<sup>6</sup> Yet, nearly fifteen years later, there is still hardly any evidence.

To be clear, existing research that claims to document the benefits of the arts is widespread, but critics point out that most existing studies are correlational and unable to demonstrate causal links.<sup>7</sup> Without the ability to demonstrate causal effects, existing arts research is unlikely to be taken seriously by policymakers. Yet, despite the call and need for more rigorous research, it is often difficult to garner support for funding. During the planning stages of the Crystal Bridges study of school tours, the research team at the University of Arkansas sought funding from multiple private philanthropies and government agencies, including the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS). In general, the timeline to implement the research project was simply too short to effectively engage in fundraising. And while many discussions with potential funders leading up to and during the research study elicited interest, there were also a number of lukewarm reactions. In many of these cases, arts advocates and patrons felt that the benefits of the arts were already well-known and well-established. As a result, the prospect of an ambitious new research project that would provide rigorous evidence was unwarranted. Moreover, many patrons voiced a preference to fund programs as opposed to research. This follows from the same assumption—since arts advocates already believe the arts are good, their goal is to expand its reach.

Directing all funding toward programs as if the research base is clearly established may be an effective short-term strategy, but it is eternally reliant on new infusions

of philanthropic dollars to keep programs alive. A potentially more effective strategy is to demonstrate to policymakers the benefits of the arts through rigorous research, thus ensuring the arts receive ample support from policy actions that can have far greater impacts than philanthropic dollars. Consider, for example, American public education. Nearly 50 million students attend America’s public schools, and total expenditures on public elementary and secondary education exceed \$600 billion dollars. Policies that increase arts exposure in America’s public schools can have consequences that dwarf even the most extravagant patron-funded programs. Arguably, such policies can be driven by producing rigorous research.

Moreover, steep declines in museum attendance and school-based arts experiences suggest the current strategy is not working. Scholars have noted that museum trips are increasingly threatened by the pressures of standardized tests and a “need for teachers and principals to document whether and in what way individual field trips satisfy curricular demands.”<sup>8</sup> In *Reinvesting in Arts Education*, The President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities notes that

“due to budget constraints and emphasis on the subjects of high-stakes testing, arts instruction in schools is on a downward trend... this is especially true for students from lower-income schools, where analyses show that access to the arts in schools is disproportionately absent.”<sup>9</sup>

The NEA has also documented the decline empirically with their Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA). SPPA findings report that the rate of participation in childhood arts education—following a steady increase throughout the 20th

century—has been declining since 1985. Particularly alarming is the fact that the declines disproportionately affect minority students. In 2008, the report finds, African American children were 49 percent less likely to receive arts education than they were in 1982, while Hispanic children are 40 percent less likely to receive arts education.

In the end, researchers at the University of Arkansas were unable to find external support to research the effects of school tours on students and teachers. However, recognizing this as a particularly unique opportunity, the researchers covered the costs of implementing the research project using sweat equity and existing resources. They also enlisted their spouses, children, student volunteers, and a mother-in-law, for data collection.

Despite the lack of external support for the research, when the results were broadly released, the study was wildly popular, garnering media coverage that included NBC Nightly News, The New York Times, USA Today, and The Washington Post. The research also received an enormous amount of attention on social media—the article covering the research in the Times became the most emailed article and received over 100,000 likes and over 35,000 shares on Facebook. It seems there is a ready and willing army of arts advocates who are hungry for this type of research.

<sup>6</sup>Weil, Stephen.E. (2000). “Transformed from a Cemetery of Bric-a-Brac,” in *Perspectives on Outcome Based Evaluations for Libraries and Museums*. Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 9-11. <sup>7</sup>Lois Hetland and Ellen E. Winner, “The Arts and Academic Achievement: What the Evidence Shows,” *Arts Education Policy Review*, 102(5) (2001), 3-6; Ellen Winner and Monica Cooper, “Mute those Claims: No Evidence (yet) for a Causal Link between Arts Study and Academic Achievement,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 34(3/4) (2000): 11-75; and Kevin F. McCarthy, Elizabeth H. Ondaatje, Laura Zakaras, and Arthur Brooks, *Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate about the Benefits of the Arts*, (2004) Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/audience-development-for-the-arts/key-research/Documents/Gifts-of-the-Muse.pdf>. <sup>8</sup>Jennifer DeWitt and Martin Storksdieck, “A Short Review of School Field Trips: Key Findings from the Past and Implications for the Future,” *Visitor Studies*, 11(2)(2008):181-197 <sup>9</sup>President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, *Reinvesting in Arts Education: Winning America’s Future through Creative Schools*. (2011) Washington, DC, [http://www.pcah.gov/sites/default/files/photos/PCAH\\_Reinvesting\\_4web.pdf](http://www.pcah.gov/sites/default/files/photos/PCAH_Reinvesting_4web.pdf)





# THE SYMPOSIUM

In the interest of building on the momentum generated by the study, Crystal Bridges held The Intersection of Research and Policy symposium in April 2014. More than 40 policymakers, advocates, philanthropists, researchers, and practitioners involved in the arts convened for two days to address some of the problems that seem to plague arts-based research and policy. The symposium was organized into three broad thematic categories: The State of Current Research, The Intersection of Policy and Research, and the Future of Policy and Research.

In the following sections, we discuss the major takeaways from each panel, as well as provide concluding thoughts about potential future steps identified by panelists.

## THE STATE OF CURRENT RESEARCH

During the first session of the symposium, the group discussed the state of current research. Questions posed to prompt the discussion included: What can we be confident in knowing from rigorous research about how the arts and culture affect students and communities? What

do people in the field think we know that is not supported with rigorous research? Why don't we know more?

The consistent and familiar refrain was that we have lots of descriptive data, but know very little based on causal research. Most scholarly work that has tried to identify the effects of arts exposure has been correlational. Additionally, when correlational studies find effects, the claims are likely overblown due to factors uncontrolled for in the research design. Finally, the bulk of studies have tended to focus on instrumental benefits of the arts rather than intrinsic benefits. That is, there are numerous claims that exposure to the arts has “transfer” effects to other academic outcomes and domains. This was also a central finding of a report conducted by the RAND Corporation and commissioned by the Wallace Foundation.<sup>10</sup>

In terms of the types of benefits that panelists felt had been established by research, one expert with a background in museum research felt that there is evidence that critical thinking is a demonstrated outcome from facilitated art experiences. Another panelist from the academic community believed that a known outcome of arts experiences is increased community engagement. Other attendees felt confidently that the arts in school increased student engagement. Panelists also agreed that childhood arts exposure is

a key predictor of adult engagement. A number of panelists also thought that there is probably more “known” than we are aware of, but because there is a lack of coherency in the various fields and disciplines conducting research in this area, our knowledge of what everyone is doing is limited. Many of the potentially important studies, especially those commissioned by cultural institutions, are never made public or shared. In some ways this might be because the information is proprietary, but it also occurs because there is no overarching field or discipline that fully encompasses this type of inquiry. Another person in attendance, an academic, also thought there is not simply a lack of good research, but rather a lack of cohesion when highlighting and publishing that research. Researchers in the arts fit into various fields, such as education, cognitive science, program evaluation, public policy, economics, and political science. Arts researchers are very small minorities within these fields, and have no distinct field of their own. As such, very little that occurs in one field is communicated across fields.

When discussing what the arts community thinks they know, the panelists agreed there are lots of outcomes that are assumed to be related outcomes of arts experiences, and offered two important takeaways. First, practitioners and advocates believe many things, and often this is informed by direct observation.

<sup>10</sup> McCarthy et al., *Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate about the Benefits of the Arts*.

These suspected or assumed benefits can form the basic foundation of hypothesis building and theory testing for researchers. In this way, what we think we know is extremely useful.

At the same time, the panelists were quick to point out that advocates for the arts often overreach when selling the supposed benefits of the arts. They cautioned against advocating for particular policies when conclusions are based on weak evidence, as it can damage the credibility of the field. Moreover, especially in the case of transfer effects and instrumental benefits, promoting the arts as a way to achieve benefits in other domains based on weak evidence may be setting the arts up to fail.

So why is rigorous research that speaks to the benefits of the arts so rare, and why are so many studies focused exclusively on instrumental benefits such as academic achievement in other subjects rather than intrinsic benefits, or what Elliot Eisner described as “the range and ways in which the arts have broadened and deepened an individual’s understanding of the world?”<sup>11</sup> Panelists suggested this was partially driven by a lack of resources and availability of data. Large-scale rigorous research projects are expensive to pull off, as is the generation of original data. Thus, studies that look at instrumental benefits are often exploiting existing measures and datasets that were likely not created with arts-based research in mind. In most cases, the studies that fill policy journals use available metrics collected by state and federal governments. These involve outcomes that are commonly and easily measured, such as dollars, standardized test data, and health outcomes.

A related problem is that the field has not done a good job of articulating the benefits the arts are intended to produce. Even the basic descriptive work, the development of the basic language from which to base inquiry, is still developing. Nor has the field developed adequate measurement instruments to assess the

intrinsic benefits of the arts. Together, these problems present significant hurdles for research in the area.

At the same time, many agreed that it was a particularly exciting time to be scientifically studying the benefits of the arts and culture. Because there is so much yet to accomplish, there is no shortage of important and useful research projects to be undertaken.

Some panelists also emphasized that the focus on instrumental benefits stems not just from available data sources, but also reflects political values and priorities. They noted that it often seems that policymakers are fixated on policies that can be reduced to workforce development and economic outcomes, and view other outcomes as frivolous. As one might expect, most of the panelists disagreed with this characterization of the arts, and rather felt that cultural experiences are central to most people’s lives and should be a larger component of public policy. As one panelist from the museum research field put it,

“Culture is how we live our lives, work is what we do when we aren’t living our lives.”

It was suggested that because this view is not pervasive among many who make policy, the field needs to conduct the type of work that can bring about changes in values. Most panelists agreed that rigorous research, focused on the intrinsic benefits of the arts, had the power to change the conversation, noting that the public is receptive to scientific evidence now more than ever. Not all in attendance, however, agreed. A few were skeptical about the ability to change the conversation through research. This point was revisited at length throughout the symposium.

## THE INTERSECTION OF POLICY AND RESEARCH

During the second session, the discussion focused on how research influences policy.

Does research have an effect on policy? What types of research are useful? Can policymakers tell the difference between good and bad research? And, does rigorous research carry more weight?

Panelists commented that it was difficult to trace the influence of research on policy because we don’t have an agency at the national level or state level that actually shapes cultural policy, which is very different from policy areas such as health, education, housing, or transportation. Agencies in other policy domains have large budgets for their activities and research, and they commission research to shed light on specific outcomes to inform policy-shaping decisions. The arts do not have such an agency. One panelist felt that this was due to a sense that, unlike healthcare or defense, the arts are viewed simply as a leisure activity, and not necessarily central to the mission of government. And though the NEA and IMLS have a small role in shaping policy through grant-making activities, their budgets are tiny when compared to many federal agencies. As one panelist noted, the military museum program grants more money to military museums and the U.S. National Parks Service gives more to parks museums than IMLS gives to all museums.

One panelist from the academic and policy community asserted that primarily, research can demonstrate an impact, or lack of an impact, for certain segments of the population. As such, research can identify who is underserved. This can lead to policies that accurately target where additional resources might be needed or identify populations that might benefit the most. If nothing else, the panelist asserted, this would seem to be the strongest argument for the need to use research to inform policy.

The panelists discussed how it was difficult to draw a line between any particular research project and a specific policy change. Policy change is a slow and

<sup>11</sup> Eisner, Elliot, “Ten Lessons the Arts Teach,” presented at Learning and the Arts: Crossing Boundaries Conference, January 2000



incremental process, and it is difficult to accurately measure the influence of research on policy. Another panelist from a government agency, however, was particularly frank and cynical about the influence of research on policy at the state level, stating that “policy is not based on research whatsoever.” Reflecting on a particular state research and evaluation unit, she felt that research was largely based on supporting what elected officials want. It was also noted that the direction of political winds can change whether or not research is paid attention to. In addition, studies conducted by the evaluation unit are not promoted or shared in a broader environment. A different panelist from a federal agency in the arts sector said that they are sometimes asked by other policymaking agencies for research that explores the influence of the arts in those other domains, often in terms related to the economy or other tangential areas. In particular, the panelists from state and federal agencies were very pessimistic about the current use of research to inform policy and compared the state of arts research to where education research was 20 years ago. The idea of using data in the field of arts and policy is still in a nascent stage, and there is not yet a critical mass of researchers and information to really move policy. At the receiving end, policymakers and practitioners may be ill-equipped to use data even when it is available.

## THE FUTURE OF POLICY AND RESEARCH

During the final session, the discussion focused on the future of policy and research. Prompts included asking the panelists what types of research are most needed for the future of the field of arts and cultural policy, and if there are specific areas researchers should be spending their time on that could especially help policymakers. Panelists and the audience also considered what might be done to increase both the quality and impact of arts and cultural research.

When it comes to what needed to be measured, all of the panelists seemed

to agree there were many unanswered questions ripe for the asking. When pressed to identify specific topics, however, there was certainly debate. The most idealistic notions proposed measuring very broad and abstract outcomes—such as impacts on happiness, humanity, sense of purpose, self-reflection, and self-discovery. Others suggested the broad measures of cognitive, behavioral, and social effects. Additional points included the impact of arts-integrated instruction on student outcomes and how this work could help to inform discussions on policies related to school curricular decisions. The more cynical, and perhaps more realistic view, was for research questions that addressed the economic impacts of the arts and cultural activities.

One panelist, a federally registered lobbyist who advocates for the arts, explained that as a consumer of research he often uses it in ways that might seem grotesque to the more idealistic attendees. When trying to sway policymakers, he said, advocates need to try and speak their language. Often this means focusing on economic outcomes and geographic specificity. Research is absolutely necessary, but advocates also need to determine what the goal is and who they have to convince to get there. He mentioned that in his work,

“**Instrumental benefits are the coin of the realm, and that is what policymakers react to.**”

Panelists also discussed that in order to make the case for supporting the arts and arts education, advocates need to make an argument that is based on the public goods that elected officials are in their careers to pursue, and how the arts can be a part of that solution. As a result, cultural policies can often be viewed as a component of social policy, such as policies regarding copyright law, net neutrality, charitable tax deductions, and similar policies. Or, for example, looking at how provisions of No Child Left Behind’s mandated testing in reading and math affect arts education in schools. Policies that affect culture and the arts are sometimes not specifically labeled as such.

The researchers and practitioners especially recognized the need for more rigorous research methods in the field. There was broad agreement on the ongoing frustration with the lack of arts education research, at least in terms of the quality of research being conducted. For too long, the field has been plagued by observational and correlational studies that do not demonstrate causal relationships between arts activities and positive outcomes. The proliferation of correlational research often produces overblown claims that are unbelievable, and unbelievable claims may do more harm than good. Rigorous research that demonstrates the causal impact of cultural experiences has a greater potential to impact policy decisions.

Not everyone agreed. Saying that he was calling out the “elephant in the room,” one attendee from a governmental agency said that he did not believe research mattered in the policy process at all. Though he thought that research was a fine pursuit, he didn’t see a connection between research and policy change.

Others disagreed and countered with examples. Specifically, it was pointed out how educational policy research has brought about enormous changes and developments in educational policy over the past two decades. It was argued that there is an intellectual climate created that moves policy that stems from the academic community and research, but it is a slow and incremental process. As a result, it can be difficult to see how any one particular research project moves policy. This was summarized by one participant through a football analogy:

“**We often give credit to the tailback who scores a touchdown in football, even if it is only a one-yard run. But to believe the tailback is responsible for the touchdown is wrong. It takes an enormous effort from the entire team to get the ball to the one yard line.**”

Pushing back, the skeptic said that having a funding base for political influence matters far more. This was countered by pointing out that in many cases, advocacy funding is directed toward producing research. The problem, it seems, is that arts advocates and patrons have directed very little funding toward policy-relevant research that could bring about changes.

In general the skepticism about the effect of research on policy receded, with an agreement that funding is crucial for policy change, both by funding research and building momentum through advocacy efforts. Those present seemed to agree that we have not yet seen enough research, particularly high-quality research, to adequately address its potential impact.

## REACHING A CONSENSUS FOR THE FUTURE

Rounding out the end of the final session was a lengthy discussion about how best to remedy the persisting problems that plague the effectiveness of research in the arts and culture.

Discussion in this area was aided by one of the academic panelists taking some time to define terms. He defined “cultural policy” as the actions of governments or organizations that foster activities or institutions promoting greater identity and cultural cohesion.

Following from this, it was noted that there is a distinction one could make between two broad types of arts research: research about arts creation and participation, and research about how participation in the arts produces valuable outcomes. In the most traditional sense, policy research studies how laws, economic and regulatory policies, institutional practices, and cultural norms affect the quantity, quality, and kind of art produced. Research on how “art works” focuses more on ways the arts affect community and individual well-being. While there is no hard distinction between the

two types of research, traditional cultural policy research focuses more on the framework within which artistic practice and arts participation take place and how policy levers may alter that framework to achieve certain ends. At the same time, “art works” research may look at how policies encourage participation, with an added emphasis on how that participation produces value for individuals and communities.

Though both types of research clearly have a potential role in influencing particular policies, it may be beneficial to be clear when we describe the different forms of arts research. Some portion of the fragmented nature of the field stems from a lack of a basic language to refer to the various activities that fall under the “arts research” umbrella. This is important because development of a rigorous research tradition has been inhibited partly because the field lacks an established vocabulary.

This led to another topic of particular interest: How should research in cultural policies be organized and supported? How can a new field of study be created?

As an academic with a set of incentives for producing research, one panelist noted that there is virtually no infrastructure that exists for the field of cultural policy in academia. For example, there is no American journal devoted to cultural policy research. Those who write in the area publish in international journals, but these journals are not necessarily seen as valuable for obtaining tenure. So this academic tries to fit her work into other areas of research, and attempts to study arts and culture through those different lenses. If she did not couch her research in those other terms, she would have nowhere to publish that her institution recognized as valuable. When asked if the actual content of her research would be different under a different incentive structure, she said it was not just “branding.” Rather, there is a big difference

in the types of research she thinks she can pursue versus what she would do if she wasn’t responding to the current incentive structure in academia.

This same academic noted that funding is also part of her incentive trajectory. But again, there are very few options. Arts patrons don’t often fund research, they fund programs. And government support for research is minimal. While she wants to help the field make progress, she has incentives in her own career that hold her back. She has been told that if she bases the early part of her career on cultural policy, then she might as well give up.

Some of the other panelists from academia had clearly put a lot of thought into the issue, and they offered up a number of strategies. As one academic noted, the traditional model for fostering research is the research center.<sup>12</sup> The center model is premised on the idea that several researchers are housed in a larger organization, such as a University or research institute. He noted that there was a surge of foundation support for centers at the turn of the last century that led to the establishment of several cultural policy centers. Consider, for example, the Cultural Policy Center at the University of Chicago, the Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies at Princeton University, and the Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy at Vanderbilt University. But the foundation support seems to have now been exhausted, and many of the centers have ceased to exist or are operating at reduced levels. No robust field of research has come from them, nor has cultural policy been adopted as a significant field in public policy schools.

An alternative model that he presented would be the establishment of a research network of scholars from different fields and different locations who work on related, but not necessarily the same, topics. This makes particular sense given that there

<sup>12</sup> Norman Bradburn, *An Investigation into the Feasibility of Establishing an Arts and Culture Research Network*, National Endowment for the Arts (2013), <http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/Research-Art-Works-NORC.pdf>.





domains, those that produce policy research are not practitioners. Though there can be some crossover, the learning of an academic discipline is a skill and path that is distinct from the characteristics one holds from being a member of an industry. Yet, those who currently participate in what might be called “cultural policy” are not trained as such. They come from various other academic disciplines, and find ways to fit cultural policy within those disciplines.

Finally, there is the matter of translating and promoting academic research into effective tools for policy change. If it is to be useful and have an impact, it must be

are various disciplines in the academic community, and it is incredibly hard to compile knowledge across disciplines. Through ongoing electronic exchanges and periodic face-to-face meetings, scholars in various disciplines could share ideas and research papers with the goal of creating a new field and giving it greater visibility. It could also aid in the production of interdisciplinary research, which is rare but particularly useful. Often, those in academia are not rewarded for doing work across disciplines, which is a major structural barrier. A solution would be to name a field that provides some cohesion. Even within such a model, however, the basic work of even naming the field led to disagreement. What is the field called? Is it cultural policy? It was evident that it will take a lot of dialogue before there can be mutual understanding among those who come from very different areas of expertise on even the basic terminology.

Another academic mentioned the possibility of establishing an association, with an annual meeting and a journal. This would help to overcome the barriers in the academy with regards to incentive structures by providing a publishing outlet, and it could help advocates by providing a central storehouse for quality research.

Others in attendance agreed that perhaps starting a journal was a possible solution. But another lamented that the situation is plagued by a classic chicken and egg problem: There is little incentive to write in the area because there are no recognized outlets for the work, and there’s no incentive to publish a journal because so little work has been done. It would also require resources to start an association, have regular meetings, or establish a journal. Training was also mentioned as a persistent problem for the field. In most policy

presented in multiple formats. And, if research is going to have the most practical value, it must be promoted. It must be presented to the public, to practitioners, and to policymakers, and in a language they can understand. Effective policy research works best when researchers view themselves as members of the policy community. Policy researchers can publish for multiple audiences using both the popular media and academic journals. More importantly, policy research is not just about studying areas that are currently policy relevant, but by actively promoting issues they feel should be relevant. And, in order to be forward-thinking, it would serve the field well to build a collective research agenda for arts and culture that anticipates future policy questions.



# CONCLUSION

At the end of the event, symposium attendees gathered on the last day to articulate their final thoughts about the topics unearthed at the symposium. Additionally, those who attended were asked to summarize their thoughts and contribute them to the session organizers via email after they had left. The key recommendations and takeaways are summarized below:

- 1 The field could be strengthened by building a formal network that connects researchers across the various disciplinary approaches from which they currently operate. This will aid in the regular sharing of research, create opportunities for collaboration, and strengthen the cohesion of the field.
- 2 Public policy schools need to devote attention to arts and cultural policy and encourage scholars who are interested in pursuing this line of research.
- 3 A new generation of researchers needs to be developed and trained to contribute to the research network. Perhaps with the right buy-in from policy schools, this training can be explicit, rather than a by-product of general policy training programs.
- 4 Better venues for publication of significant policy-related research in the arts need to be developed, or existing policy journals need to be leveraged to publish the types of research that can move the field forward.

- 5 Researchers must engage multiple audiences using different approaches. In addition to publishing in peer-reviewed academic outlets, this includes writing popular media pieces and actively sharing their work with policymakers and practitioners.

The field needs ongoing support from arts patrons and government agencies. It is possible that demonstrating the effectiveness of rigorous research from some initial studies will motivate patrons and policymakers to increase their support for effective research.

The task at hand is a difficult one. The symposium at Crystal Bridges may serve as a starting point for the type of networking and field-building the community desperately needs. There seems to be a small but growing number of researchers interested in conducting this type of work, and beginning this a dialogue was clearly a step in the right direction.







## APPENDIX: LIST OF SYMPOSIUM ATTENDEES

**Barbara Bassett**

Constance Williams Curator of Education,  
School and Teacher Programs  
Philadelphia Museum of Art

**Norman Bradburn**

Senior Fellow  
NORC at the University of Chicago

**John Brown III**

Executive Director, Windgate Foundation  
Windgate Foundation

**Ivonne Chand O'Neal**

Director of Research and Evaluation  
The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

**Betty Farrell**

Executive Director  
Cultural Policy Center, University of Chicago

**Andy Finch**

Director of Policy  
Association of Art Museum Directors

**Ben Garcia**

Pacific Region Museum Education Director  
National Art Education Association

**Laura Goodwin**

Vice President, Learning & Engagement  
Walton Center for the Performing Arts

**Jay Greene**

Professor of Education Reform  
University of Arkansas

**Michelle Grohe**

Director of School & Teacher Programs  
Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

**Jeannie Hulen**

Chair, Department of Art  
University of Arkansas

**Scott Jones**

Senior Associate for Research and Policy  
Arts Education Partnership  
Council of Chief State School Officers

**Brian Kisida**

Senior Research Associate  
University of Arkansas

**Randi Korn**

Founding Director  
Randi Korn & Associates, Inc.

**Sarah Lee**

Vice President for Arts & Culture  
Slover Linett Audience Research  
Paul Leopoulos Executive Director  
Thea Foundation

**Benjamin Lindquist**

CEO  
Exalt Education

**Jessica Luke**

Assistant Director, Research  
University of Washington

**Cathy Lund**

Senior Program Officer  
Walton Family Foundation

**Carlos Manjarrez**

Director, Office of Planning,  
Research and Evaluation  
Institute of Museum and Library Services

**Max Marmor**

President  
Samuel H. Kress Foundation

**Samuel Mehr**

Doctoral Candidate  
Harvard University

**Kassie Misiewicz**

Executive Artistic Director  
Trike Theatre

**Sandy Nickerson**

Program Officer, Special Interest Programs  
Walton Family Foundation

**William Craig Rice**

Director, Division of Education  
National Endowment for the Humanities  
Former President, Shimer College, Chicago

**Narric Rome**

Vice President of Govt Affairs & Arts Education  
Americans for the Arts

**Lynn Russell**

Head, Division of Education  
National Gallery of Art

**Kimberly Sheridan**

Associate Professor  
George Mason University

**Steven Shewfelt**

Deputy Director, Office of Research & Analysis  
National Endowment for the Arts

**Sheree Speakman**

Founder and CEO  
CIE Learning

**Lynn Tuttle**

Director of Arts Education  
AZ Department of Education

**Zannie Voss**

Director  
SMU National Center for Arts Research

**James Walton****Mike White**

Sponsor  
First Quality Enterprises, Inc.

**Sandy White**

Sponsor  
First Quality Enterprises, Inc.

**Wendy Wolf**

Learning Programs Manager  
Vizcaya Museum and Gardens

**Joanna Woronkowicz**

Assistant Professor  
Indiana University

**Laura Zakaras**

Researcher and communications analyst  
RAND