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ENGAGING AUDIENCES IN ADVOCACY

They're fanatical about opera. They support your company. They might even contribute and attend fundraisers. Audience members are an untapped group that can increase our influence in arts advocacy. Here are a few ways to engage your audiences in the issues that impact our field.

1. Share Advocacy Successes

Did your municipal or state policymakers pass legislation that supports the arts? Make sure you inform your audiences. Perhaps this could be a pre-show announcement publicly thanking your representative for his/her support. You can also include this information in your programs or social media feeds. Be sure to share how this support impacts your company and the performances and programs offered in your community. What would get eliminated if your company lost access to these resources?

2. Participate in Advocacy Days

In any given year, your company may add its voice to Opera Advocacy Day, your state's arts advocacy initiatives or National Arts Advocacy Day (for which OPERA America serves as a national co-sponsor). Professionals in the arts community tend to be the participants in these initiatives. But what if we began thinking of audiences as part of the arts community? Share the dates of the advocacy days in which your company is participating, along with the relevant Twitter hashtags for the event. Your audience may also want to join in the conversation in person or online.

3. Highlight VIPs

When a lawmaker attends a performance or visits a community program, make sure to highlight the visit in your communications to ticket buyers. It's an opportunity for audiences to see their representatives support the arts. For greater engagement, include the lawmaker's Twitter handle. Your audience's retweets can demonstrate the broad support your company has in the community.



Ann Meier Baker, the NEA's director of music and opera, speaks at the inaugural Opera Advocacy Day.

ARTS ADVOCACY TIP

The arts are non-partisan. Don't forget that your audience is representative of a diversity of political beliefs. The issues that impact the arts, including support for arts funding and arts education, charitable giving, and cultural exchange, are not party-affiliated. Keep your talking points focused on the issues. This will prevent you from offending your audience, and it will also keep you in line with laws regarding nonprofits and politics.