

RADFORD UNIVERSITY

Application of Human-Centered Design to Identify and Address Challenges in the Baltimore Theatre Community

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Title Page

APPLICATION OF HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN TO IDENTIFY AND ADDRESS CHALLENGES IN THE BALTIMORE THEATRE COMMUNITY

By

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Abstract

Theatre industry challenges are well documented in case studies and publications around the world; thus, it was surprising to find there were no such research studies on the theatre community in Baltimore. As the foundational research study on this topic, findings will inform future research by providing a baseline understanding of challenges faced by Baltimore theatre companies and highlighting areas for further research. The purpose of this research study was to determine how industry challenges are experienced in the Baltimore theatre community and engage with the people that organize, create, and perform theatrical works in Baltimore to help them collectively identify and address challenges.

The research study consisted of an online survey and an online design-thinking session. From February 1 through February 22, 2021, 26 Baltimore theatre community stakeholders identified industry challenges they experienced via the online survey. During the online design-thinking session, nine stakeholders framed challenges provided in the survey based on their experience. Participants worked together to categorize, evaluate, and address these challenges.

The long-term sustainability of the Baltimore theatre community is threatened by a wide array of complex and interrelated challenges. Creation of a central organization is needed to empower the theatre community for collectively addressing these challenges. Baltimore theatre industry challenge areas that require urgent attention are ensuring fair pay for theatre company staff and artists, audience development, ensuring affordable rehearsal and performance spaces, and partnership development. Efforts made to address these challenges will stabilize the Baltimore theatre community, which is currently unsustainable and unable to grow.

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-------|
| Abstract | 2 |
| List of Figures | 5 |
| CHAPTER | |
| I. Introduction | 6-7 |
| Purpose..... | 7 |
| Justification | 7 |
| Research Question | 7 |
| Definition & Description of Terms | 7-11 |
| II. Literature Review | 12-18 |
| Previous Studies | 12-16 |
| Summary | 17-18 |
| III. Methodology | 18-23 |
| Research Design | 19-20 |
| Sample | 20-21 |
| Instrument & Procedure | 21-23 |
| IV. Results | 23-35 |
| V. Discussion | 35-41 |
| Findings..... | 35-38 |
| Internal Validity & Limitations..... | 38-39 |
| Control Measures..... | 39 |
| Recommendations & Areas for Future Research..... | 40-41 |
| Conclusion..... | 41 |
| VI. References | 42-44 |
| VII. Appendices | 45-57 |
| Appendix 1: Recruitment Instruments..... | 45 |
| Appendix 1A: Recruitment Email Template..... | 45 |
| Appendix 1B: Social Media Recruitment Template | 45 |
| Appendix 2: Research Instruments | 45 |
| Appendix 2A: Online Survey Questions..... | 46-48 |
| Appendix 2B: Design Thinking Activity Steps..... | 48-49 |
| Appendix 2C: Participant Tracker Spreadsheet..... | 50 |
| Appendix 2D: Activity 1 Affinity Clustering..... | 51 |
| Appendix 2E: Activity 2 Visualize the Vote | 52 |
| Appendix 2F: Activity 3 Rose, Bud, Thorn | 53 |
| Appendix 2G: Activity 4 Concept Poster | 54 |
| Appendix 2H: Cover Letter for Internet Research..... | 55 |
| Appendix 2I: Design Session Consent Form..... | 56-57 |

List of Figures

| | |
|---|----|
| Figure 1. Theatre Industry Challenges..... | 17 |
| Figure 2. Survey Question Callout Box..... | 19 |
| Figure 3. Survey Response Summary..... | 25 |
| Figure 4. Interrelated Theatre Industry Challenges..... | 36 |

Introduction

World-renowned playwright and novelist Thornton Wilder once said, “I regard the theatre as the greatest of all art forms, the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being” (Goldstone, 1956). I believe this quote communicates the value of theatre as it applies to culture. Theatre companies provide places where people come together to tell stories and share experiences about being human. Audiences engage with artists and each other to explore emotions and thought-provoking social issues. Theatre companies entice audiences with beautiful, funny, and sometimes horrific stories about the human experience.

Theatre companies provide safe and inclusive spaces where actors and audience can build empathy with others through shared storytelling experiences. Despite providing unquantifiable value to society, many researchers, such as the Theatre Communications Group (TCG), study the theatre industry using mainly a set of quantitative economic methods developed to assess other industries without also including the qualitative perspectives of the people at the heart of the industry (TCG, 2020). How can a community hope to develop comprehensive solutions to theatre industry challenges without understanding what it is like to experience those challenges from the perspective of theatre practitioners?

This idea inspired me to research news articles, research publications, and personal testimonials in which theatre industry challenges were mentioned. I found many examples of financial, business, and cultural theatre industry challenges occurring in companies around the world, but I did not find any formal research publications focused on how those industry challenges were experienced in the

Baltimore theatre industry. There were around 40 unique theatre companies in the Baltimore area at the beginning of this research study (GBCA, 2020). Some were large and well-resourced theatre companies focused on traditional theatrical performance, while smaller volunteer-driven companies focused on original scripts and practiced applied theatre. Nationally, theatre companies face a myriad of financial, cultural, business, and entertainment competition challenges. Were these industry challenges experienced by the Baltimore theatre community, and if so, how might they be addressed?

To address these research gaps, I employed human-centered design-thinking methods to conduct a research study focused on identifying, framing, and addressing theatre industry challenges within the Baltimore theatre community. The purpose of this research study was to determine how industry challenges were experienced in Baltimore theatre companies and engage with the people that organized, created, performed, and otherwise enabled theatrical works in Baltimore to help them collectively identify and address these challenges. This research study evaluated the Baltimore theatre industry by engaging with the creative directors, executive directors, actors, and other stakeholders that comprised these companies to ensure challenges were articulated from their perspective.

Definitions & Descriptions of Terms:

Actor: “One who acts in a play, movie, television show, etc.” (Merriam-Webster, 2020).

Affinity Clustering: [Description] A design-thinking activity in which participants identify and categorize information into groups (Luma, 2012).

Applied Theatre: [Description] Theatre performance methods that fall outside mainstream practices, which commonly include use of non-traditional performance spaces, inclusion of non-

professional actors, and involvement of communities in script development and interpretation (Tidey, 2019, p. 6-7).

Artistic Director: [Description] A person that is responsible for conceiving, developing, and implementing the artistic vision and focus of a theatre company. He or she typically reports to the chief administrative officer, although in some companies the two positions are combined into one. The Artistic Director is responsible for conceiving, developing, and implementing the artistic vision and focus of the organization, and for major decisions about the ongoing development of the aesthetic values and activities, after extensive consultation with the chief administrative officer (AACT, 2020).

Chief Administrative Director/Executive Director: [Description] Whether the title is Executive Director, Managing Director, President, or CEO, the chief administrative officer of a theatre company is the guiding force of the organization. This person may have any one of many titles, and duties will vary, depending on the size of the company, and whether a separate position handles the artistic direction of the company (AACT, 2020).

Choreographer: [Description] A person that designs and directs the dance or stylized movement in theatrical productions (AACT, 2020).

Concept Poster: [Description] A design-thinking activity in which participants illustrate the main points of an idea by combining images and narrative on a poster (Luma, 2012).

Costumer Designer: [Description] A person that creates the look of each character by designing clothes and accessories the actors will wear in performance (AACT, 2020).

Director: [Description] A person that provides a vision for the production by bringing together the script, actors, set, costuming, lighting, sound, and music into a unified whole (AACT, 2020).

House Manager: [Description] A person that coordinates and oversees cleanliness, facilities, and all matters related to audience interaction prior to a play (AACT, 2020).

Lighting Designer: [Description] A person that manages stage lighting functions to make the actors and their environs visible to the audience (AACT, 2020).

Marketing/Publicity Director: [Description] A person that manages the promotion of productions, services, and information about the public image of the theatre company (AACT, 2020).

Music Director: [Description] A person that selects music, works with singers in partnership with the director, rehearses with the cast and orchestra, and serves as conductor for all performances. In addition, a composer may write original music for the show. All the music and/or effects in a play considered as a whole make up the “soundscape” (AACT, 2020).

Playwright: [Description] A person that creates scripts. Like other literary artists, playwrights tell stories through the words and actions of characters (AACT, 2020).

Production Manager: [Description] A person responsible for ensuring that all aspects of the production are completed within budget, according to the designer’s and director’s wishes, and in time for the first public performance (AACT, 2020).

Purposive Sampling: “A nonrandom sample selected because prior knowledge suggests it is representative, or because those selected have the needed information” (Fraenkel et al., 2015, p. G-7).

Qualitative Research: “Research in which the investigator attempts to study naturally occurring phenomena in all their complexity” (Fraenkel et al., 2015, p. G-7).

Rose, Bud, & Thorn: [Description] A design-thinking technique for identifying factors as positive, negative, or having potential, where different color sticky-notes are used to categorize factors (Luma, 2012).

Set Designer: [Description] A person that designs the physical surroundings in which the action will take place (AACT, 2020).

Sound Designer: [Description] A person that plans and provides the sound effects in the play, including music from existing sources (AACT, 2020).

Stage Manager: [Description] A person that typically provides practical and organizational support to the director, actors, designers, stage crew, and technicians throughout the production process. They also are the director’s representative during performances, making sure that the production runs smoothly (AACT, 2020).

Stakeholder: “A person who has vested interests in the outcomes of a study” (Fraenkel et al., 2015, p. G-8).

Technical Director: [Description] A person that has the daily responsibility for the technical operations of a theatre or performing arts center, including lighting, sound, set design and construction, and coordinating necessary maintenance (AACT, 2020).

Theatre: [Description] A collaborative form of performing art that uses live performers, typically actors or actresses, to present the experience of a real or imagined event before a live audience in a specific place, often a stage. The performers may communicate to the audience through combinations of gesture, speech, song, music, and dance. Elements of art, such as painted scenery and stagecraft such as lighting, are used to enhance the physicality, presence, and immediacy of the experience (Banham, 1998).

Theatre Company: [Description] An organization that produces theatrical performance (Collins Dictionary, 2020).

Visualize the Vote: [Description] A design-thinking activity in which participants vote for one topic or object from a given group (Luma, 2012).

Literature Review

Previous Studies

When reviewing research on the theatre industry, I discovered most published reports focused on quantitative evaluation of theatre companies (NYC, 2019; TCG, 2020). These reports focused primarily on evaluating the industry in terms of marketing effectiveness, sales totals, and economic impact. Quantitative metrics for evaluating the theatre industry are important, but research studies should also include qualitative data about challenges experienced by the people in the industry. One study that did branch out of purely quantitative analysis was conducted by a non-profit theatre promotion organization called the Theatre Communications Group (TCG). This research study, conducted in 2000, focused on identifying a comprehensive list of quantitative and qualitative challenges across the United States theatre industry (Coen et al., 2000). See Figure 1 for a full list of the theatre industry challenges I identified during literature review.

TCG led discussions with approximately 80 theatre industry stakeholders in Chicago, Dallas, San Francisco, and New York City to gather data. The challenge topics they identified included describing the responsibility of theatre company management to their artists, determining the appropriate degree of community involvement, articulating the value of theatre, evaluating the impact of company management and funding practices on artistic value, low artist compensation, the impact of racial and sexual orientation biases on casting, and the long-term sustainability of high-quality theatre. A key excerpt from this publication read:

In short, these may not be issues that can be “resolved.” There are no simple answers. Many of the most important issues will continue to be addressed most effectively at the local level via skillful ongoing discussions within the theatre and its community. Let “solutions” fit the character of the community, the institution, and the people. (Coen et al., 2000, p. 2)

TCG continued to host conferences in which they facilitated identification and evaluation of theatre industry challenges. In 2014, challenge topics identified in the conference report included theatre company board performance and best practices, the need to tailor solutions for industry challenges to each company, methods for finding and growing new artists, and how to create a fiscally reliable environment where theatrical innovation can occur (Wrappe, 2014). In 2017, challenge topics identified included managing theatre company leadership transitions, reevaluating standard theatre company business models, disaster readiness, the need for business interruption insurance, ongoing impacts of racism, sexism, and homophobia. Conference participants framed these challenges as cultural barriers that continued to divide people and limit their capacity to take care of one another across borders of identity (Patterson, 2017).

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) released a research report in 2008, which evaluated the growth metrics and challenges experienced by the United States theatre industry. The challenges they identified included creating methods for developing audiences, handling declining attendance, developing effective pricing strategies, the supply of live theatre outpacing demand, and theatre company reliance on financial support from individual donations and foundation grants (NEA, 2008). The research in this report also determined that audience attendance of live theatre was not correlated with ticket pricing. “Although further research is needed to explore the issue, the audience drop-off may be more related to issues like lower media coverage, declining arts education, and expanded in-home entertainment options rather than ticket price” (NEA, 2008, p. 2). The findings in this report are significant facts for theatre companies to consider when addressing industry challenges; yet, this report was conducted in 2008, and much has changed in the theatre industry in the past 13 years.

More recently, theatre industry challenges highlighted by Mr. Wakeman, an experienced theatre industry consultant, included determining a method for communicating the value of theatre, developing effective marketing, improving pricing strategy and sales, development of effective organizational

strategies, effective management of supporter subscriptions and sustaining memberships, prioritizing impactful storytelling and meaningful experiences, need to build a sense of community, and the need to keep relevant stakeholders at the center of decision making (Wakeman, 2017). Mr. Wakeman's insights highlighted challenges experienced by theatre companies that sought his consulting services in the United States. What theatre companies are doing outside our borders is also relevant.

In the Canadian theatre community, companies experienced challenges in the form of biases and stereotypes related to accurately conveying transgender experiences through theatre. Challenges included theatre presenter acceptance of transgender themes, transgender content being created by non-transgender persons, a tendency for transgender stories to focus on surgeries and physical transitions rather than the holistic human experience, and creation of nuanced transgender characters respectful of their community (Drake, 2016). Consideration of gender and sexual orientation are important moral factors that should be considered when addressing challenges in the theatre industry.

The Seattle theatre industry was very successful at the turn of the century, but experienced a decline in audience by the end of their 2001 season. Some attributed the early and continued success of Seattle theatre companies to the clear distinction between each company's mission and unique artistic focus. Researchers determined several challenges contributed to their declining popularity, including a downturn in the economy, homogenization of theatre company missions, artistic focus areas, and a surplus in the number of theatre companies may have created excess capacity concerning supporter demand (Koenig et al., 2003).

In New York City (NYC), there was an organization devoted to helping theatre companies address industry challenges. The Alliance of Resident Theatres (ART) helped theatre companies focus on problems related to organizational structure, staffing, long-range planning, board development, leadership transitions, debt consolidation, and facilitation of conversations with industry partners and

other workshops (ART, 2020). The services offered by this organization highlight significant theatre industry challenges experienced by companies in NYC. Examining theatre issues around the United States and abroad provides context on the problems identified thus far. What is happening in Baltimore specifically, the focus of this study, is discussed next.

A recent Baltimore news article highlighted Single Carrot Theatre (SCT) for adopting a new organizational model focused on performing site-specific theatre. The primary challenge identified in the news article was concern about maintaining effective relationships with the community and audiences when a company does not work out of a fixed “black box” theatre location (Pandolfi, 2019). Baltimore Magazine recently featured an article in which they discussed a broad trend of increasing community engagement in the Baltimore theatre community (Jackson, 2019). The article characterized broad objectives and projects such as highlighting works by women, people of color, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) playwrights, re-evaluation of how theatre companies worked with artists, the role of theatre companies in local education, and activism, and a need to identify and develop the next generation of theatregoers (Jackson, 2019).

In December of 2019, the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission reported outbreaks of a new respiratory virus (WHO, 2020). This Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) quickly spread around the world and resulted in nations restricting public gatherings to prevent person-to-person transmission of the virus. These restrictions meant theatre companies across the world would have to suspend or cancel scheduled in-person performances, which also occurred for Baltimore theatre companies (Greenberg, 2020). Smaller theatre companies often relied on grants or state subsidies and struggled to secure financial support during this time (Lewis, 2020). Many theatre companies adapted to public gathering restrictions by creating virtual performances via the Internet. The robust resources of large theatre companies enabled them to effectively create these shows while smaller companies struggled (Lewis, 2020).

These broad efforts hinted at underlying industry challenges, but they did not fully identify or characterize them in a complete way. Although news and magazine articles often highlight Baltimore theatre companies, there were no formal published academic research articles focused on the Baltimore theatre community. To address this gap, this research study determined how theatre industry challenges were experienced in the Baltimore theatre community by engaging with stakeholders to ensure the challenges were articulated from the perspective of the people who comprised the community. Furthermore, this research study used human-centered design-thinking methods to identify, frame, and address theatre industry challenges with community stakeholders.

Theatre Industry Challenges

| Financial | Business | Cultural |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluating the impact of funding practices on artistic value - Low artist/actor compensation - Long-term sustainability of high-quality theatre - Need to establish fiscally reliable environments that enable theatrical innovation - Disaster readiness - Need for business interruption insurance - How to handle declining attendance - Need for effective pricing strategies - Supply of live theatre outpaced demand - Financial reliance on individuals and foundations grants - Competition among theatre companies in the same geographic area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describing fair relationship between theatre companies and artists - Accurately conveying the value of theatre - Evaluating impact of company management on artistic value - Maintaining company board performance, evaluation, and best practices - Need to tailor solutions for complex problems to each industry challenge - Identifying methods for finding and growing new artists - Managing theatre company business models - Need to create methods for developing audiences - Expanded in-home entertainment options - Maintaining effective marketing - Development of effective organizational strategies - Effective long-term planning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Determining appropriate degree of community involvement - Impact of race, sex, and sexual orientation bias on casting - Lower media coverage - Declining arts education - Balancing need to prioritize impactful storytelling and meaningful experiences - Need to keep relevant stakeholders at the center of decision making (context-based) - Need for authentic storytelling that involves input from relevant communities |
| <p>Industry challenges aggregated from: ART, 2020; Coen et al., 2000; Drake, 2016; Koenig et al., 2003; NEA, 2008; Patterson, 2017; Wakeman, 2017; Wrappe, 2014.</p> | | |

Figure 1

Summary

Research into the theatre industry revealed common challenges experienced by theatre companies, but there was no rigor applied to studying these challenges in the Baltimore community where I live and attend theatre. This exploratory research study was the first to formally identify how broader industry challenges are experienced within local theatre companies in Baltimore, and it placed the people who form these companies at the center of articulating challenge context. I am excited about the potential benefits of highlighting local theatre industry challenges in a formal research

study. Publishing and presenting the findings of this study raise awareness of the challenges, and it may help Baltimore theatre companies gain additional resources by giving them a relevant and credible academic source to cite when engaging with organizations that support the arts.

Methodology

As the foundational research study on this topic, findings will inform future research by providing a baseline understanding of challenges faced by Baltimore theatre companies and highlighting areas for further research. This research study will advance the body of theatre industry research by being the first to characterize the impact of industry-wide challenges at the local level in Baltimore, Maryland. The purpose of this research study was to determine how industry challenges were experienced in Baltimore theatre companies and engage with the people that organize, create, perform, and otherwise support theatrical works in Baltimore to help them collectively identify, frame, and address challenges in their community.

To achieve this purpose, the sample group for this research study only included Baltimore theatre industry stakeholders. It was also important to focus on stakeholders that comprise theatre companies more likely to experience severe impacts on industry challenges. Based on my research, I knew that smaller theatre companies struggled to obtain financial resources and relied primarily on grant funding, which impacts their ability to handle industry challenges, so I had informal conversations with Baltimore theatre industry stakeholders to ensure I did not accidentally exclude any theatre companies (Lewis, 2020). I reached out directly to theatre companies to develop points of contact for soliciting participation and promoting this research study within the Baltimore theatre community.

Research Design

The research study occurred in two consecutive phases. In phase one, I conducted an online survey to gather industry challenge data from stakeholders. The survey enabled me to gather data on theatre industry challenges experienced by stakeholders in Baltimore, and I included survey questions that enabled me to recruit participants for an online design-thinking session that occurred during phase two. I tailored the survey questions to gather data from participants without influencing their inputs by introducing challenges identified in the literature review. For example, questions six through seven were crafted as open-ended questions to ensure challenge data was gathered in the participants' own words with no influence from the student researcher; see Figure 2 for an example. This approach allowed me to compare data gathered during the literature review with data gathered from the participants of this research study. I used survey data gathered in phase one to populate the first activity during the online design-thinking session.

In phase two, I familiarized participants with Internet-based Zoom and MURAL applications and conducted an online design-thinking session. I chose to use the Zoom application for video teleconferencing because it became widely used during the COVID-19 pandemic and it had built-in security features. I chose to use the MURAL application for virtual collaboration because it was easy to use, and I felt comfortable enough with instructing participants how to use it. The online design-thinking session consisted of four consecutive activities focused on enabling participants to identify, frame, and address theatre industry challenges in the Baltimore theatre community. These four activities consisted of:

Survey Questions

- 6.** Please list and briefly describe the theatre industry challenges you experience in the Baltimore theatre community.
- 7.** Of these challenges, which do you consider the most significant or important? Please explain your answer in detail.
- 8.** What do you perceive as the most serious challenge faced by Baltimore theatre companies collectively?

Figure 2

1. Affinity Clustering (20 Minutes): I transferred challenge topics gathered in the survey to the virtual MURAL collaboration area. Participants categorized challenges provided during the survey into groups they titled based on factors they deemed important. This research study contrasts the stakeholder-defined challenge categories with those the student researcher used in the literature review (financial, business, and cultural).
2. Visualize the Vote (10 Minutes): Each participant voted on the challenge topic they wanted to focus on for the remainder of the design-thinking session.
3. Rose, Bud, Thorn (30 Minutes): Participants worked together to identify positive factors, negative factors, and opportunities for the challenge topic.
4. Concept Poster (30 Minutes): Participants worked with student investigator to aggregate ideas and graphics that represented their personal experience of the challenge topic, and opportunities from activity three, in a virtual collage.

Sample

Population Sample & Recruitment:

Baltimore theatre industry stakeholders (defined in the “definitions of terms” portion of the thesis) were the population group for the survey and online design-thinking activities. Twenty-six stakeholders responded to the survey, and nine stakeholders participated in the online design-thinking session. Survey participants included actors, artistic staff, play directors, marketing directors, playwrights, theatre company executive directors, production managers, stage managers, artistic directors, house managers, costume designers, set designers, sound/music designers, lighting designers, puppeteers, choreographers, board members, board vice presidents, and grant writers associated with at least 12 theatre companies. The online design-thinking session participants included actors, theatre company founders, board members, executive directors, and artistic directors associated with six

theatre companies. Many participants in this population fill multiple roles simultaneously and a few are associated with multiple theatre companies.

I recruited a purposive sample of theatre community stakeholders that focused on applied theatre, experimental theatre, and community theatre in Baltimore by engaging with theatre company representatives using an online survey to gather information about the challenges they experience. My approach was to have as many stakeholders as possible take the survey to ensure the amount and variety of data gathered was representative of the sample. The first question of the online survey presented an informed consent cover letter, and each participant agreed before proceeding to the other questions. After the survey, I gathered and organized all survey data and contact information in a hidden folder using the Microsoft-recommended SecretFolder application, which required a password to un-hide the folder. I motivated stakeholders to participate by advertising the benefits of completing a formal research study and ensuring their personal anonymity during thesis activities. All data from the survey and online design-thinking session was not correlated with individual participants or individual theatre companies. As the first research study to formally evaluate theatre industry challenges in Baltimore, this research study will inform future research and highlight Baltimore theatre industry needs to inform problem solving.

Instrument & Procedure

Survey Recruitment Instruments & Procedure:

I solicited participation from pre-identified subjects within my personal social network via email (see Appendix 1B for email template). Subjects outside my personal social network were recruited via posts made by me in the private [Baltimore Theatre Call Board](#), [Baltimore Theatre](#), and [Baltimore Theatre Exchange](#) Facebook groups (see Appendix 1C for the social media message template). I received membership and ability to post in these social media groups. Question 1 of the online survey contained the cover letter for internet research for the purpose of obtaining informed consent.

Participants selected “I Agree” before being allowed to answer the questions, or if they selected “I Disagree,” they were forwarded to the end of survey message without providing data. Question 10 in the survey solicited participation in an online design-thinking session focused on identifying and addressing Baltimore theatre community challenges. Only participants that responded “yes” to question 10 were provided access to question 11, which collected their contact information. Participants’ contact information was only used to obtain informed consent and coordinate participation in the online design-thinking session. If participants selected “no” for question 10, they were forwarded to the end of survey message. *See Appendix 1 for the participant recruitment email, Appendix 2A for the survey questions, and Appendix 3A for the theatre participant sample pool and participant status tracker spreadsheet.*

Design Session Instruments & Procedure:

The online design-thinking session consisted of four sequential collaborative design-thinking activities that took place over 2 hours. Participants joined a passcode-protected Zoom video teleconference (VTC) call and a virtual MURAL collaboration area I organized. I obtained signed informed consent forms and familiarized participants with the Zoom and MURAL applications before beginning design-thinking activities. I facilitated nine participants simultaneously in the video chat and online collaboration applications.

1. Affinity Clustering: I gathered and transferred each distinct theatre industry challenge provided by survey participants and transferred them to the MURAL collaboration area for this activity in the form of virtual sticky notes. I guided participants through organizing the challenges into categories and creating titles for each category. Participants changed the color of the virtual sticky notes, used color-coded group circles, and created challenge group titles to complete this activity. Participants were able to contribute additional challenges and create as many categories as they wanted during this session.
2. Visualize the Vote: Each participant voted on the individual challenge they perceived as the most important by placing a red “vote” dot next to its sticky note. The challenge with the most votes was used for rose/bud/thorn and concept poster activities.

3. Rose/Bud/Thorn: Participants provided positive factors, negative factors, and opportunities related to the challenge identified in the previous activity. Each input was represented with virtual sticky notes created and placed in the corresponding category by the participants. This activity enabled participants to provide qualitative and experiential data on a theatre industry challenge they experienced.
4. Concept Poster: Participants created a virtual collage to represent their collective experience of the challenge. The collage consisted of images, key words, and phrases. This activity enabled participants to contextualize the challenge by engaging their artistic creativity.

For the design-thinking session, I simultaneously hosted a video chat session with the Zoom application and a virtual collaboration session with the MURAL application. Two computer screens were used side-by-side to ensure the student researcher could view the Zoom and MURAL applications simultaneously. All design-thinking activities were conducted in MURAL by participants while facilitated by the student researcher. *See Appendix 2 for design-thinking session activities.*

Results

Phase 1

Survey Results:

From February 1 through February 22, 2021, 26 Baltimore theatre community stakeholders identified industry challenges they experienced via the online survey. Participants provided 32 distinct challenges that were used to populate the virtual MURAL collaboration space for the affinity clustering activity in phase two. Many challenges were repeated across multiple survey responses. Those challenges included lack of communication/cooperation between theatre companies, lack of well-paying theatre work, lack of affordable rehearsal/performance spaces, theatre professionals leave Baltimore for well-paid full-time positions in other cities, and lack of adequate support from Baltimore City. Among these commonly mentioned challenges, lack of well-paying work and lack of communication/cooperation between theatre companies were mentioned most often.

Many of the industry challenges identified in the literature review were also mentioned participant survey responses. Based on my research and the survey results, funding, stakeholder compensation, and audience development seem to be foundational challenges that undermine sustainability of theatre companies. Although theatre industry stakeholders struggle with similar challenges across many cities, the challenges faced by the Baltimore theatre community seem to be more severe. Data collection indicated that the funding, stakeholder compensation, and audience development challenges experienced in Baltimore are so drastic that they undermine the long-term existence of Baltimore theatre companies.

Survey Response Summary

| Theatre Challenges | Amount Mentioned |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 1. Limited revenue / funding restricts artistic quality | 11 |
| 2. Lack of racial and economic diversity amongst leadership, board, staff, and artists | 11 |
| 3. Lack of affordable & adequate producing / rehearsal / performance venues | 9 |
| 4. Hard to attract and retain larger and more racially and economically diverse audiences | 7 |
| 5. Baltimore theatre workers make well below minimum wage | 6 |
| 6. Limited communication amongst theatre companies | 5 |
| 7. White supremacist structures in arts funding | 4 |
| 8. The Baltimore theatre community is not sustainable | 4 |
| 9. Baltimore city theatre professionals leave for well-paid full time theatre positions in other cities. | 4 |
| 10. Many theatre companies are volunteer-run and the ability to volunteer is a privilege some cannot afford | 4 |
| 11. Lack of support from Baltimore City | 3 |
| 12. Limited amount of well-paid work | 3 |
| 13. Theatre company resiliency / COVID Impact | 3 |
| 14. Difficult to achieve sustainable growth | 3 |
| 15. Competition amongst companies for resources and talent | 3 |
| 16. No tools or training to create a space that is sufficiently antiracist, feminist, queer-friendly, accessible | 3 |
| 17. Lack of well-paid work restricts/prevents race and economic equity in Baltimore theatre | 3 |
| 18. Limited fundraising opportunities for theatre companies with non-traditional business structures | 2 |
| 19. Hard to Market shows | 2 |
| 20. Over-saturated theatre market (too many companies and not enough audience) | 2 |
| 21. Hard to build collaboration relationships between companies | 2 |
| 22. Lack of a unifying, collaborative, policy-setting organization to support the community | 2 |
| 23. Lack of developed audience for "edgy" or non-traditional performances | 2 |
| 24. Lack of cooperation between larger well-funded companies and smaller companies | 2 |
| 25. Lack of Universal Basic Income (UBI) | 1 |
| 26. Lack of funding for independent artists | 1 |
| 27. Lack of publications / media that consistently review theatre | 1 |
| 28. Dichotomy between pricing tickets so low-income persons have access to shows and raising ticket prices to increase revenue | 1 |
| 29. companies to elevate 'mission' to the detriment of storytelling, writing and presentation | 1 |
| 30. Attracting people to shows who are not already involved in other theater companies | 1 |
| 31. Lack of communal spaces that allow emergent artists to collaborate | 1 |
| 32. No community-wide "place" to address concerns or share resources | 1 |

Figure 3

Phase 2

Affinity Clustering Results:

Nine participants organized 32 challenge sticky notes into six categories they created. The participants were hesitant at first but quickly settled into the activity after becoming comfortable with manipulating sticky notes and category graphics within the MURAL application. I suggested color-coding the virtual sticky notes as a way of forming initial challenge categories. This approach worked well for categorizing challenges based off the group discussion, and the participants rapidly completed the activity once they began color-coding challenges. Participants were active in the conversation and manipulation of the challenges, with some participating more in conversation and others categorizing challenges based on the discussion. The challenge sticky notes were populated with language directly from survey responses. Challenge categories created by participants included Audience Development, Collaboration, Funding & Compensation, Racism & Structure, Sustainability, and Other. Eight challenges were placed within the Racism & Structure category, seven challenges were placed within the Funding & Compensation category, seven challenges were placed within the Collaboration category, four challenges were placed within the Sustainability category, four challenges were placed within the Audience Development category, and four challenges were placed within the Other category.



The Racism & Structure category encapsulated challenges related to creating equity and accessibility within theatre based on race, sexual orientation, and other socioeconomic factors. Participants were somewhat tense and uncomfortable discussing challenges in this category but it was clear that they wanted theatre to become more accessible to low-income and transportation-challenged persons. One participant framed participation in Baltimore theatre as a privileged act as it requires excess income and reliable transportation to attend rehearsals and performances. The Collaboration category encapsulated challenges related to the lack of tools, processes, and a central organization for facilitating communication and collaboration between theatre companies. Much of the conversation around this topic focused on inconsistency of past efforts to collaborate amongst theatre companies, and the lack of a central organization to facilitate collaboration and problem solving. The Funding & Compensation category encapsulated challenges related to the lack of well-paid theatre work in Baltimore, loss of theatre professionals to well-paid theatre jobs in other cities, and limited funding options. Participants were quick to identify the inter-related nature of theatre industry challenges during this discussion. For example, the lack of a developed audience for theatre limited revenue gained from ticket

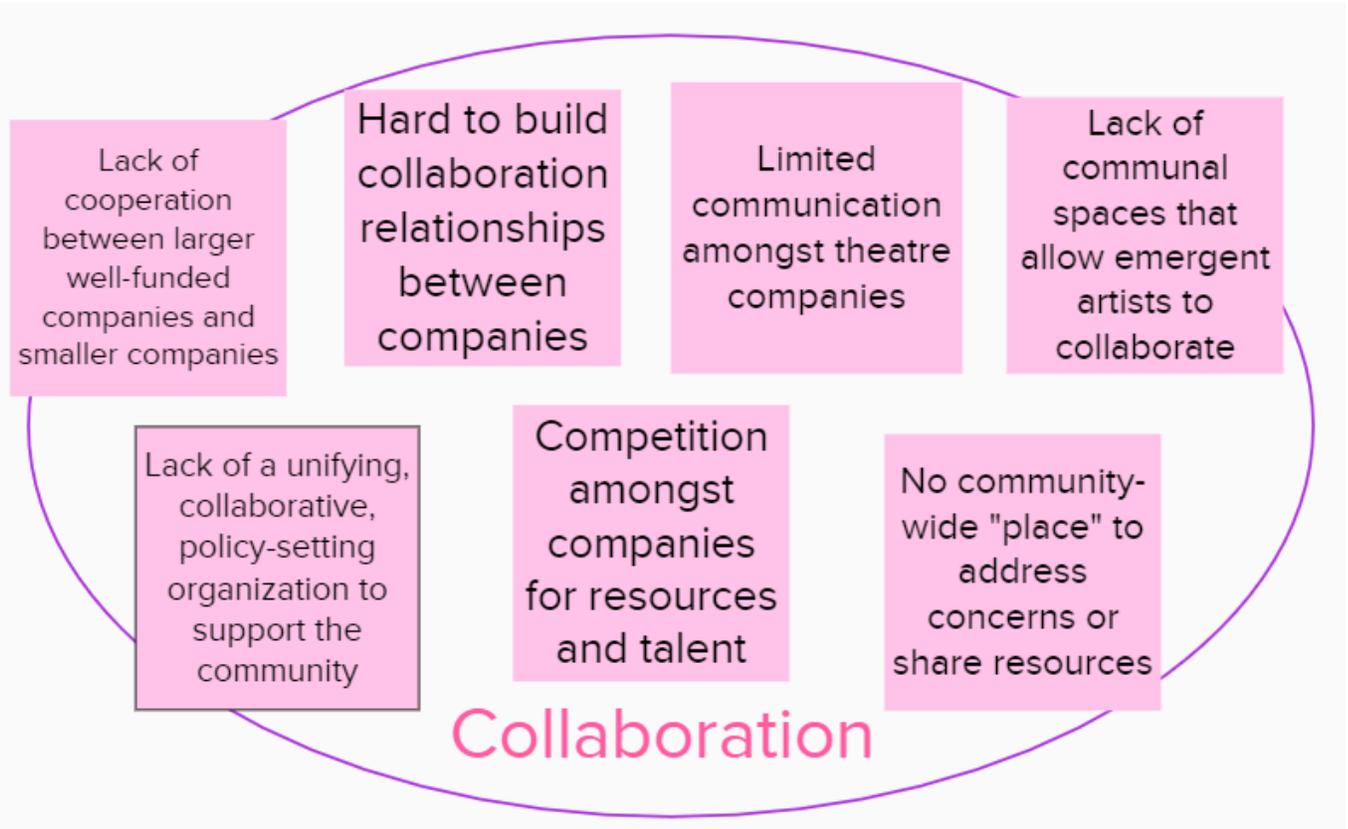


sales and sustaining memberships, which further exacerbated inability to compensate staff and artists. The Sustainability category encapsulated challenges related to achieving sustainable growth, the impact of limited funding on artistic quality, and the impact of limited audience for non-traditional theatre on the sustainability of companies. The sustainability conversation was less about individual challenges and more about the nature and severity of how challenges impact Baltimore theatre community stakeholders. The group approached this activity primarily from the perspective of Baltimore theatre stakeholders, but some of the participants shared insights based on experiences outside the Baltimore theatre community. Participants were concerned that the existence of their theatre companies, the quality of their performances, and their ability to achieve fair compensation practices were threatened by significant financial challenges. The Audience Development category encapsulated challenges related to effective marketing, lack of theatre review publications and media, attracting audiences that are not already involved in other theatre companies, and too many theatre companies and not enough audience. Participants discussed audience development efforts as a way of increasing revenue, improving accessibility, and achieving fair compensation. The Other category was created to include challenges that did not fit well into the other categories based on the participants' experiences. The Other category included lack of adequate support from Baltimore City, theatre community resiliency / COVID 19 impact, and theatre companies prioritize their organizational mission over quality writing, storytelling, and presentation. Most of the discussion in this category focused on lack of support from Baltimore City Government. Participants commented on the trend of cities designating dilapidated urban areas as "arts districts" to receive national, state, and private grant funding for renovating buildings. Based on participant discussion and feedback, it does not seem like any of these revitalization resources were used to help the Baltimore theatre companies by providing what they need. Many stakeholders perceive that they are being used to gentrify Baltimore city neighborhoods, which they find deeply unsettling. See Appendix 2D for the before-and-after affinity clustering design artifact.

Racism and Structure

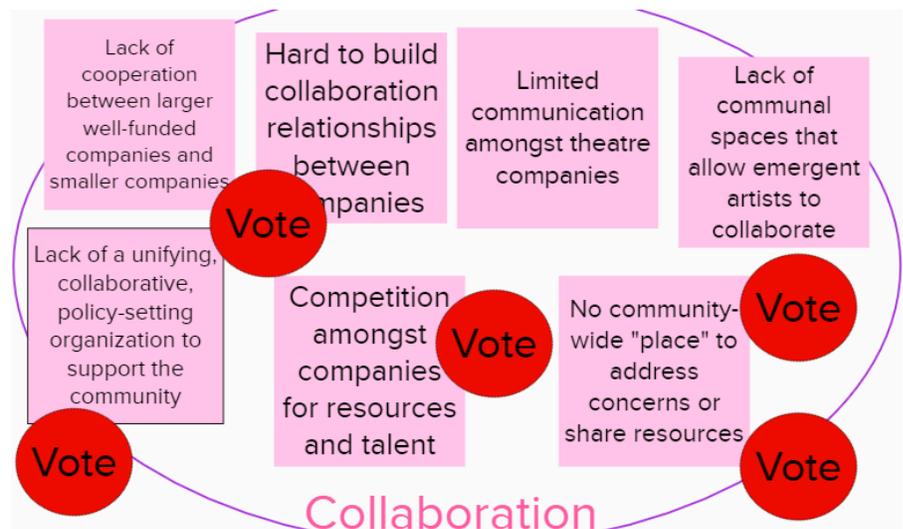


Collaboration



Visualize the Vote Results:

Nine participants voted anonymously on the challenge they wanted to focus on for the remainder of the online design-thinking session by placing red “vote” markers next to their preferred challenge. Participants were invited to discuss their choices but declined. It seemed like they preferred continuing to work as a group based on the votes rather than discuss individual preferences. Five votes were made on challenges in the Collaboration category, three votes were made on challenges in the Racism and Structure category, and one vote was made on a challenge in the Sustainability category. The challenge that received three votes was selected as the focus challenge for the rose/bud/thorn and concept poster activities. Note that four votes were made on two similar challenges related to lack of an organization to enable more effective communication and collaboration between Baltimore theatre companies. See Appendix 2E for the visualize the vote design artifact.



Challenges and vote totals:

- 3 votes: Lack of well-paid work restricts / prevents race and economic equity in Baltimore theatre.
- 2 votes: Lack of a unifying, collaborative, policy-setting organization to support the community.
- 2 votes: No community place to address concerns or share resources.
- 1 vote: Competition amongst companies for resources and talent.
- 1 vote: Lack of developed audience for edgy or non-traditional theatre performance.

Rose, Bud, Thorn Results:

The focus challenge for this activity was “Lack of well-paid work restricts / prevents race and economic equity in Baltimore theatre.” Nine participants provided one positive factor, six negative factors, and seven opportunities related to the focus challenge, which received the most votes in the last activity. Participants were comfortable discussing negative factors and opportunities but were very hesitant to imply anything positive about the challenge topic, because lack of pay reinforces economic and racial equity among theatre stakeholders. The only positive factor identified is that some public and private funding exists to help address paying stakeholders well. Negative factors expanded context for the challenge by highlighting more-detailed aspects. Theatre companies do not earn or receive enough income to support fair pay for the number of people it takes to make a show. Pay problems span both artists, artistic directors, and administrative staff. Regarding this negative factor, one participant stated, “I would like to be able to pay actors at least minimum wage, a little more for artistic directors and producers, and I would like to be able to pay market rate for administrative staff.”

One negative factor focused on how Baltimore City and real estate developers tout the Baltimore arts community as an asset without proving adequate resources to support it. Regarding this negative factor, one participant stated, “100% true. Developers get showered with tax incentives, artists get a





few highly competitive grant programs, and are used as a gentrifying force.” Theatre company survival often takes precedence over paying fair wages for individuals, which contributes to artists leaving Baltimore for other cities. The current gig economy, where people can work any time, creates increased competition for individual artists.

Opportunities identified for this challenge were focused around unlocking the potential of the Baltimore theatre community. Participants believed that collaborative audience development initiatives could help improve pay by increasing revenue. New theatre opportunities are created when artists leave for other cities, and this creates opportunity for new theatrical work. Another opportunity highlights an idea for organizing and performing fewer shows to ensure high performance quality and better pay. Participants believe Baltimore is an amazing environment for individuals to grow artistically. See Appendix 2F for the ruse/bud/thorn design artifact.

Concept Poster Results:

The focus challenge for this activity remained “Lack of well-paid work restricts / prevents race and economic equity in Baltimore theatre.” Nine participants created graphics, gathered images from the Internet, and used virtual sticky notes to create a concept poster in the MURAL web application. Participants discussed the challenge factors from the previous activity, previous efforts to organize the

theatre community, and ways to improve their ability to pay staff and actors a fair wage. Underpinning these conversations was the need for Baltimore theatre community stakeholders to work together toward addressing challenges they experience. Many theatre companies went out of business during the COVID-19 pandemic, and these occurrences seemed to underpin the urgency of the need to collaborate on challenges. The main feature of the concept poster is a graphic with three concentric circles characterizing three levels of compensation. This graphic resembles a bullseye diagram but was created naturally amongst participants without prompting. The outside “poor pay” ring represents the current state of stakeholder compensation in the community and is the least desirable. The existing funding and compensation model results in artist burnout and increased accessibility barriers to entry for Baltimore theatre. The middle “decent wages” ring represents the bare minimum improvement for the community to professionalize theatre company staff and artist work roles. The center “fair pay” ring represents an ideal solution where increased resources allow for fair compensation, increased capacity enables companies to attract a wider demographic, creates space for new voices, and lowers accessibility barriers to entry and participation for Baltimore theatre.

One sticky note reads “Theatre as a civic value worthy of more city budget dollars.” This element represents conversation around the need to articulate the value of theatre to public leaders for justifying public funding for theatre companies. Another sticky note represents conversation focused on working

Collaborative resource generation



together to create an audience development pipeline. Many theatre companies succeed due to support from a loyal audience group that regularly attends performances. Participants discussed an idea for an “audience disloyalty program,” which would offer discounted ticket pricing to encourage existing audiences to see performances at different theatre companies. Participants also note that audience

attendance at different theatres could be tracked via a punch card reward system like those used in similar rewards-based promotion customer loyalty models. See Appendix 2G for the concept poster design artifact.

Discussion

Findings

Lack of published research on challenges faced by the Baltimore theatre community made addressing these challenges more difficult. A TCG report, released in 2000, examined a myriad of theatre challenges across the United States and determined that there is no simple one-size-fits-all solution (Coen et al., 2000, p. 2). The report went on to recommend that solutions to these challenges should be resolved at the local level. Solutions for theatre industry challenges in Baltimore need to be developed locally amongst city, non-profit, and theatre community stakeholders. This research study addressed the research gap by engaging with Baltimore theatre community stakeholders to identify and frame the challenges they face. The data is presented from the stakeholders' perspective in their own words. As the first research study focused on the Baltimore theatre community, the findings within form a foundational understanding of how theatre challenges are experienced in Baltimore, and they should inform future research and planning to address these challenges.

Long-term sustainability of the Baltimore theatre community is threatened by complex and interrelated challenges. The financial, business, and cultural challenges listed in Figure 1 are experienced in the Baltimore theatre community and impact one another, compounding their impact and creating a cycle of increasing unsustainability. Key among these challenges are fair stakeholder compensation, theatre community collaboration, and audience development, because they combine to undermine the long-term sustainability of the Baltimore theatre community. One participant characterized the cycle by stating "There is not enough cultivated audience or resources to support adequate payment for artists and staff. This creates an endless cycle of capacity challenges. (i.e.- no

paid staff or underpaid staff to market shows and lack of adequate marketing budget to market shows, therefore, not enough audience to generate revenue to increase payment for artists & staff). This then limits artistic quality and sustainability of companies. It also creates a brain drain in Baltimore where those who want to make a living as artists or work more full time in theatre have to leave the city as

Interrelated Theatre Challenges

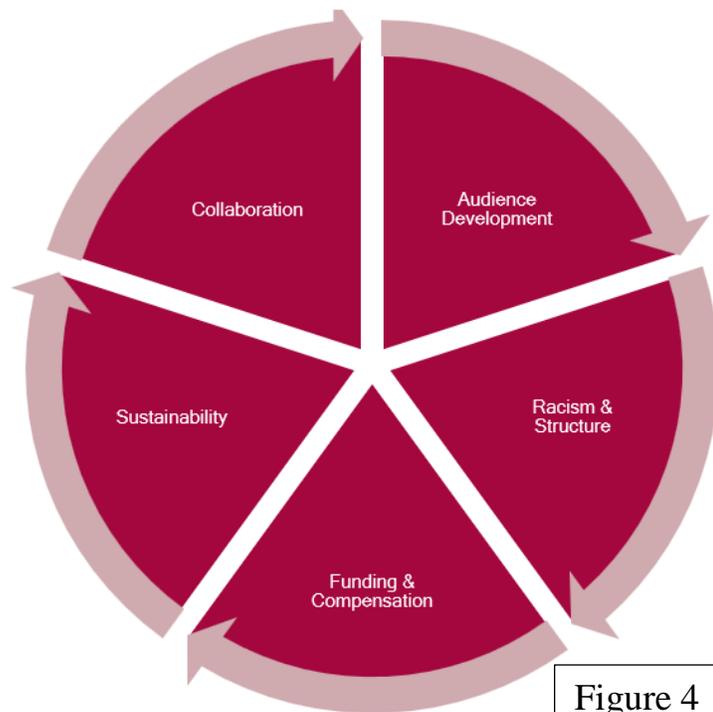


Figure 4

there are not adequate opportunities to do that here. This also greatly impacts race and economic equity, as it requires privilege to participate in theatre regularly when not being compensated anywhere near minimum wage.” Similar to the method employed in a 2014 conference hosted by TCG, Baltimore theatre stakeholders require a central organization to facilitate tailoring of solutions for industry challenges at the local level, creation of methods for finding, growing, and retaining new artists, and figuring out how to create a fiscally reliable environment where theatrical innovation can occur (Wrappe, 2014).

The Baltimore theatre community lacks a centralized organization to facilitate communication amongst theatre companies, collective problem solving, partnership development, and long-term planning. In NYC, the Alliance of Resident Theatres (ART) helped theatre companies focus on problems related to organizational structure, staffing, long-term planning, board development, leadership transitions, debt consolidation, and facilitation of conversations with industry partners and other workshops (ART, 2020). Many participant survey responses, design-thinking session conversations, and design artifacts created during the online session highlighted the urgent need for a

central organization like ART in Baltimore. Several participant survey responses mentioned disparity between larger well-resourced theatre companies and smaller theatre companies that struggle to make their voices heard. This organization should include equal representation for each theatre company in Baltimore to ensure equity amongst all theatre community stakeholders. Several participant survey responses highlighted challenges of independent theatre artists not associated with one theatre company. This organization should ensure a process and structure to include independent artist voices. This organization should enable the theatre community to engage with city planners, neighborhood revitalization planners, and key non-profit organizations to ensure theatre community equities and concerns are addressed in planning efforts.

The Baltimore theatre community lacks affordable rehearsal and performance spaces. Many participant survey responses mentioned the high price of renting existing rehearsal and performance spaces. Theatre companies are already operating under severe resource restrictions due to lack of funding, lack of developed audience, and many other challenges. The high price of existing rehearsal and performance spaces exacerbates an already unsustainable model for resourcing and compensation practices. Several participants specified the need to make existing spaces more affordable instead of creating new more-affordable spaces. The Baltimore theatre community should explore all options to increase the amount of affordable rehearsal and performance spaces.

Due to severe resource restrictions, Baltimore theatre community stakeholders struggle to effectively promote performances and develop audiences. A 2008 research report released by the NEA suggested that audience drop-off may be related to issues like lower media coverage, declining arts education, and expanded in-home entertainment options rather than ticket price (NEA, 2008, p. 2). The data gathered in this research study implies that addressing financial resource challenges across the Baltimore theatre community will improve each company's ability to independently promote performances and develop audience by enabling them to hire marketing professionals with experience advertising events on social media. While improving the capacity of individual companies to perform

these functions is an important challenge, broader collaboration and partnership efforts managed by a central organization could improve audience development across the entire Baltimore theatre community by providing performance marketing as a service.

The Baltimore theatre community is not able to pay staff and artists a fair wage, which results in people leaving the city to pursue theatre careers in other cities. Lack of revenue from ticket sales, limited individual donations, sustaining memberships, public funding, and grant funding does not enable theatre companies to pay their staff or artists a fair wage. In fact, based on the data provided by participants of this research study, they are paid well below minimum wage, which requires many to work full-time jobs and pursue acting as a hobby. This severe lack of funding undermines the long-term sustainability of theatre companies and independent theatre stakeholders in Baltimore. Baltimore is home to one of the top five arts high schools in the country, Baltimore School for the Arts (BSA), which has a theatre program (BSA, 2021). Baltimore is home to the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), which has theatre-focused courses (MICA, 2021), and the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC), which has an entire theatre department and several theatre-focused degree programs (UMBC, 2021). Many other colleges in Baltimore, such as Loyola University, Towson University, Morgan State University, and Johns Hopkins, have theatre programs as well. The career pipeline for theatre professionals includes a top high school, a myriad of bachelor's degree programs, and master's degree programs, but there is a sharp career drop-off when graduates attempt to pursue a career in the Baltimore theatre community.

Internal Validity / Limitations

Although the survey data was representative of the complete population sample, limited participant responsiveness to recruitment for the online design-thinking session resulted in less complete representation of the population sample for these activities. Some technological malfunctions caused minor process delays, but they were quickly addressed. The recruitment strategy and recruitment

methods were tailored to motivate stakeholders to participate, and all activities were open for any Baltimore theatre industry stakeholder to participate. I used existing personal relationships with many theatre industry stakeholders in Baltimore, which helped me build trusting relationships with other participants. I also posted weekly recruitment messages in frequently used Baltimore theatre community Facebook groups. Yet, because of the convenience sampling technique employed, the findings from this research cannot be generalized to the population.

Control Measures

I, as the student researcher, ensured procedures protected participant information. All participant-provided data was anonymized to the greatest extent possible, and all data was stored on a password-protected hard drive and further secured by the Microsoft-recommended SecretFolder application. The online survey required acceptance of an informed consent letter before participants could proceed. Participants also agreed to provide personal contact information before being allowed access to questions soliciting the information. The informed consent letterhead, challenge-focused questions, and contact information question were all separated by page break survey logic to ensure participant data is not associated with their contact information. Theatre industry challenge data and participant contact information were stored separately throughout the research study.

Activity one of the design-thinking session was designed to minimize student researcher influence on participant-provided data. For example, I created three challenge categories within the literature review based on intuition, but the affinity clustering activity is designed to only include participant provided challenges from the survey and challenge category groups participants created. In activity two of the design session, each participant voted unanimously to ensure full focus on the challenges was maintained throughout the activities.

Recommendations & Areas for Future Research

- Baltimore theatre community stakeholders should form a central organization to facilitate communication, collective problem solving, partnership development, and strategic planning.
 - Partnership development efforts should include relevant Baltimore city offices, the Baltimore Development Corporation, the Neighborhood Design Center, relevant neighborhood revitalization planners (such as Market Center Merchants Association for the BROMO arts district), and local university theatre program leadership.
 - Efforts focused on ensuring affordable rehearsal and performance spaces should include neighborhood revitalization planners and city planners. Locating performance venues close to public transportation hubs may improve racial and economic accessibility for theatre company boards, staffs, and acting roles by making participation easier. Baltimore city leaders should consider subsidizing the cost rehearsal and performance spaces to revitalize the Baltimore theatre community.
 - Efforts to provide fair pay for theatre company staff and actors should include Baltimore city leadership and relevant non-profit organizations. Planners should explore, ideate, and realize a sustainable high school-to-retirement career path for theatre professionals in Baltimore.
 - Audience development efforts should include city offices, community revitalization planners, local colleges and universities, and other relevant organizations. Performance advertisement and audience development efforts could be managed by a central organization to alleviate financial burden on individual theatre companies.
- Future research should examine how Maryland state and Baltimore City arts funding is spent. How is funding earmarked to support theatre companies, and does any of the funding make it to individual companies in a way that enables them to address challenges?

- Future research should examine why individual theatre industry stakeholders left Baltimore on a case-by-case basis to build a deeper understanding of the city's theatre talent retention problem.

Conclusion

The design-thinking methods applied as instruments in this research study worked well for gathering data from theatre industry stakeholders. Employing a human-centered approach to implementing these instruments allowed me to ensure data was gathered and presented from each participant's perspective. I think the collaborative way design-thinking methods are employed resonated well with the way theatre professionals are trained to relate to, and improvise based on, each other's contribution. This research study was conducted virtually via the Internet due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but I believe in-person design-thinking methods would work as well due to similarity with collaborative performance rehearsal practices. I recommend use of design-thinking methods in future research on the theatre industry.

The long-term sustainability of the Baltimore theatre community is threatened by a wide array of complex and interrelated challenges. Creation of a central organization is needed to empower the theatre community for collectively addressing these challenges. Baltimore theatre industry challenge areas that require urgent attention are ensuring fair pay for theatre company staff and artists, audience development, ensuring affordable rehearsal and performance spaces, and partnership development. Efforts made to address these challenges will stabilize the Baltimore theatre community, which is currently unsustainable and unable to grow.

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Appendices:Appendix 1: Recruitment InstrumentsAppendix 1A: Recruitment Email Template

Greetings Baltimore Theatre Companies!

My name is Brian Long, I live in Baltimore, I am an active theatre goer, and I am a graduate student finishing an MFA in Design-Thinking (creative and collaborative problem solving). I plan to focus my thesis on Baltimore theatre companies, which is why I am emailing you today to gauge your interest for participating in a research study.

I reviewed research on theatre industry challenges over the past year, and I was surprised to learn that there are no formal academic reports on Baltimore's vibrant theatre scene. To fill this research gap, the research study will determine how global industry challenges are experienced in the Baltimore theatre community and engage with the people that organize, create, and perform theatrical works in Baltimore to help them collectively identify, frame, and address challenges. The thesis project will consist of an online survey, participation in a virtual collaborative problem-solving session facilitated by me. Please respond to this email if you are interested being a participant for this research study.

The work you do is inspiring, and I am excited about the opportunity to work with you this year.

Sincerely,
Brian Long (he/him)
Graduate Student
Radford University
School of Design, MFA Design Thinking

"I believe that in a great city, or even in a small city or a village, a great theatre is the outward and visible sign of an inward and probable culture." – Laurence Olivier

Appendix 1B: Social Media Recruitment Template

Greetings Baltimore theatre community! My name is Brian Long (he/him), I live in Baltimore, I'm an active theatre goer, and I'm a graduate student finishing an MFA in Design-Thinking (creative and collaborative problem solving). My thesis on Baltimore theatre companies, which is why I am contacting you today to gauge your interest for participating in a research study.

I reviewed research on global theatre industry challenges over the past year, and I was surprised to learn that there are no formal academic research reports on Baltimore's vibrant theatre scene. To fill this research gap, our research study will determine how global industry challenges are experienced in the Baltimore theatre community and engage with the people that organize, create, and perform theatrical works in Baltimore to help them collectively identify, frame, and address challenges. The thesis project will consist of an online survey and participation in a virtual collaborative problem-solving session facilitated by me. Please email me at along67@Radford.edu if you are interested being a participant for this research study.

Appendix 2: Research Instruments

Appendix 2A: Online Survey Questions

1. Do you agree to participate in this research study?
 - a. I Agree
 - b. I Disagree

2. What work role do you fill in your theatre company? (select all that apply)
 - a. Actor
 - b. Artistic Director
 - c. Executive Director
 - d. Choreographer
 - e. Costume Designer
 - f. Director
 - g. House Manager
 - h. Lighting Designer
 - i. Marketing Director
 - j. Music/Sound Designer
 - k. Playwright
 - l. Production Manager
 - m. Set Designer
 - n. Stage Manager
 - o. Other (Please Specify)

3. What is the mission of your theatre company? (Open response with 100-character limit)

4. How do you characterize the size of your theatre company? (Choose One)
 - a. Small (30 seats or less)
 - b. Medium (30-50 seats)
 - c. Large (More than 50 seats)
 - d. Other: Please Explain

5. “Does your theatre company operate as a non-profit or for-profit organization?” (Choose One)
 - a. Non-Profit
 - b. For-Profit
 - c. Not Applicable (Not affiliated with one theatre company)

6. Please list and briefly describe the theatre industry challenges you experience in the Baltimore theatre community. Email me at along67@Radford.edu if you run out of room and have more to contribute. (Open response with 100-character limit)

7. Of these challenges, which do you consider the most significant or important? Please explain your answer in detail. Email me at along67@Radford.edu if you run out of room and have more to contribute. (Open response with 100-character limit)

8. What do you perceive as the most serious challenge faced by Baltimore theatre companies collectively? (Open response with character limit)

9. Do you collaborate with other theatre companies in Baltimore to address challenges? If so, how? (Open response with character limit)

10. Would you, or your theatre company, provide a representative to participate in a one-and-a-half hour online collaborative problem-solving session to address industry challenges experienced by Baltimore theatre companies? (Fall or Winter 2020) (yes/no)
11. If yes, please provide that person's preferred contact information. (Name, company, email address, phone number)

Appendix 2B: Design Session Activity Steps

Activity One:

Affinity Clustering [20 Minutes]

Activity Setup: Student researcher transferred each theatre industry challenge identified in the online survey into the online Mural collaboration area. Challenges were depicted on colorful squares and categories were depicted by larger color-coded circles. See Appendix 2D for design artifact.

Activity Execution: Participants grouped theatre industry challenges into categories by moving the smaller squares into the larger circles. Participants chose the number of categories and each category title by manipulating the MURAL pieces. Participant collaboration occurred via guided discussion facilitated by the student investigator.

Activity Two: Visualize the Vote [10 Minutes]

Activity Execution: The student researcher instructed participants to vote for the theatre industry challenge they wanted to focus on for the remainder of the design session. Participants voted unanimously by placing a red dot by the challenge. See appendix 2E for design artifact.

Activity Three: Rose/Bud/Thorn [30 Minutes] *Activity Execution:* The student researcher instructed participants to identify and place positive factors, negative factors, and opportunities in the corresponding areas. Positive factors were placed in the green circle, negative factors were placed in

the red circle, and opportunities were placed in the blue circle. The student researcher facilitated group discussion to ensure the group remained on track to complete the activity within the allotted time. See appendix 2F for design artifact.

Activity Four: Concept Poster [30 Minutes]

Activity Execution: The student researcher facilitated group discussion about the challenge with participants while participants input words, phrases, and images in the MURAL virtual collaboration area. The conversation focused on how participants experience the challenge, and the opportunities identified during activity three.

Appendix 2C: Participant Tracker Spreadsheet.

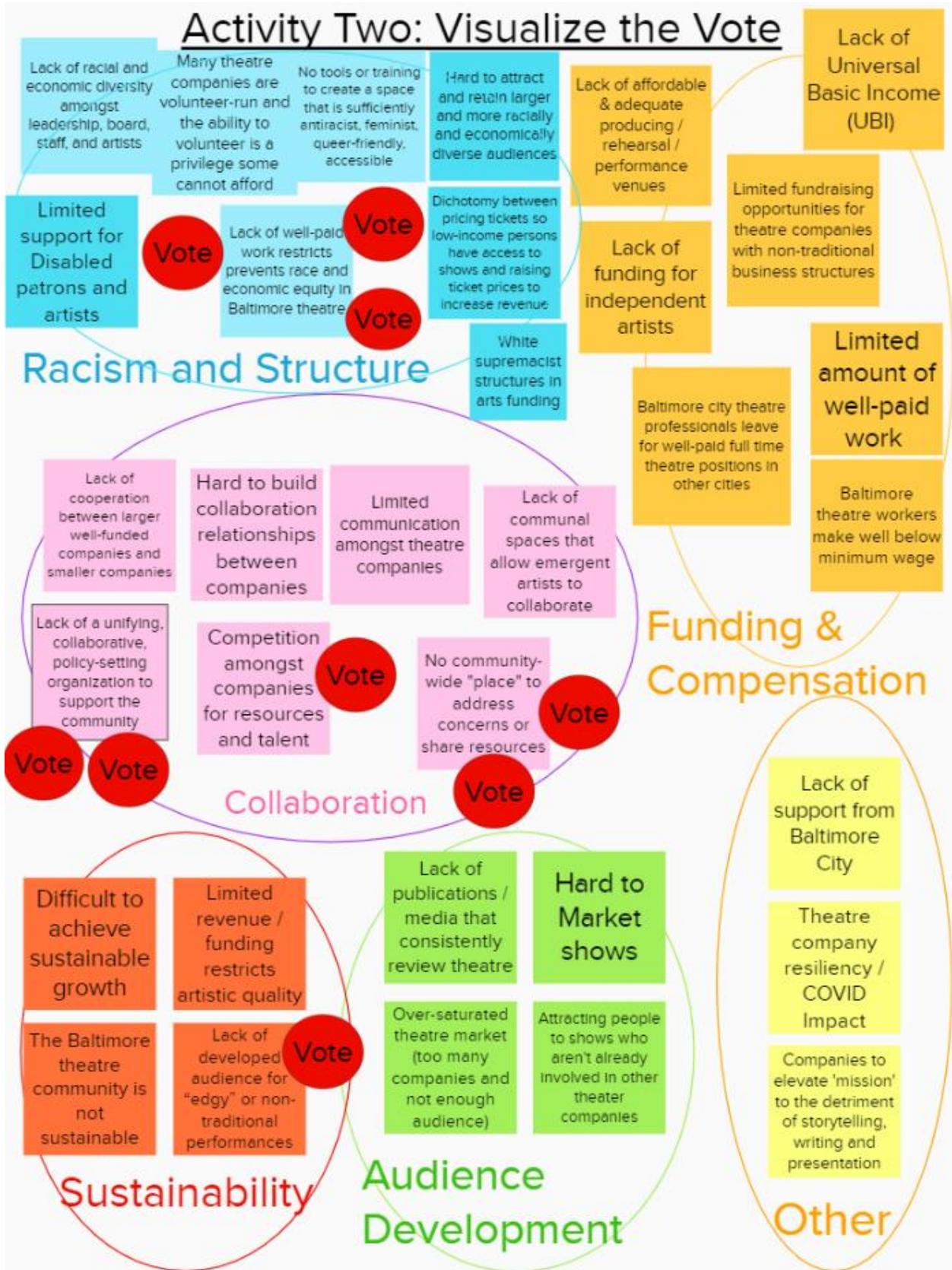
| Company Name | Email Address | Phone Number | Online DT Session POC | # of Survey Respondants |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Artscentric | | | | |
| Arena Players | | | | |
| Baltimore Center Stage | | | | |
| Baltimore Rock Opera Society | | | | |
| Baltimore Shakespeare Factory | | | | |
| Charm City Classics | | | | |
| Charm City Fringe | | | | |
| Chesapeake Shakespeare Company | | | | |
| Cohesion Theatre Company | | | | |
| Everyman Theatre | | | | |
| Fells Point Corner Theater | | | | |
| Interrobang Theatre | | | | |
| Single Carrot Theatre | | | | |
| Spotlighters Theatre | | | | |
| Stillpointe Theatre | | | | |
| Strand Theater | | | | |
| Submersive Productions LLC | | | | |
| The Acme Corporation | | | | |
| Vagabond Players Inc. | | | | |
| WombWork | | | | |
| Key: | | | | |
| | Participant Confirmed | | | |
| | Cannot Participate | | | |
| | May Participate | | | |

Appendix 2D

Activity One: Affinity Clustering



Appendix 2E



Appendix 2F

Activity Three: Rose, Bud, & Thorn

Focus Challenge

Lack of well-paid work restricts prevents race and economic equity in Baltimore theatre



Negative Factors



Opportunities



Appendix 2G



Appendix 2H: Cover Letter for Internet Research**Radford University Cover Letter for Internet Research**

You are invited to participate in a research survey, entitled "Application of Human-Centered Design to Identify and Address Challenges in the Baltimore Theatre Community." The research study is being conducted by Brian Long (along67@radford.edu) and Dr. Bruce Parsons (Phone #540-831-6628) of Radford University P.O. Box 6967 Radford, VA 24142, (540) 831-5386.

The purpose of this study is to examine how theatre industry challenges are experienced in the Baltimore theatre community. Your participation in the survey will contribute to a better understanding of these challenges. We estimate that it will take about 20 minutes of your time to complete the questionnaire. You are free to contact the investigator at the above address and phone number to discuss the survey.

We anticipate that your participation in this survey presents no greater risk than everyday use of the Internet. Some of the questions we will ask you as part of this study may make you feel uncomfortable. You may refuse to answer any of the questions, take a break or stop your participation in this study at any time".

The research team will work to protect your data to the extent permitted by technology. It is possible, although unlikely, that an unauthorized individual could gain access to your responses because you are responding online. This risk is similar to your everyday use of the internet.

Email addresses and phone numbers will be kept during the data collection phase for tracking purposes only. IP addresses will not be recorded. A limited number of research team members will have access to the data during data collection. Identifying information will be stripped from the final dataset.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may decline to answer any question and you have the right to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. If you wish to withdraw from the study or have any questions, contact the investigator listed above. If you choose not to participate or decide to withdraw, there will be no negative consequences. Individuals may withdraw from the study by contacting the investigator listed above.

If you have any questions or wish to update your email address, please call Student Researcher Brian Long at along67@radford.edu or Principal Investigator Dr. Bruce Parsons at Phone #540-831-6628 or send an email to bparsons8@radford.edu. You may also request a hard copy of the survey from the contact information above.

This study was approved by the Radford University Committee for the Review of Human Subjects Research. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject or have complaints about this study, you should contact Ben Caldwell, Institutional Official and Dean of the College of Graduate Studies and Research, bcaldwell13@radford.edu, 1.540.831.5724.

If you agree to participate, please select the "I Agree" option below. Otherwise select the "I Disagree" option to exit the survey.

Thank you.

Appendix 2I: Design Session Consent

Department of Design



Adult Informed Consent – Online Design-Thinking Session

P.O. Box 6967
Radford, VA 24142

Title of Research: Baltimore Theatre Community Growth

(540) 831-5306
(540) 831-5719 FAX

Researcher(s): *Alan B Long Jr. and Dr. Bruce Parsons*

www.radford.edu

We ask you to participate in a research study designed to identify and address challenges faced by the Baltimore theatre community. If you decide to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in an online design session focused on theatre industry challenges in Baltimore. The session will take place simultaneously on the Zoom video chat application and the Mural virtual collaboration application. Voice and video communication will occur via the Zoom application while you will manipulate virtual collaboration spaces (much like a white board with sticky notes) in the Mural application. The group will consist of 8 Baltimore theatre industry stakeholders, and you will be asked to provide experiential information from your perspective by participating in facilitated virtual collaboration activities. The facilitated activities include:

- Affinity Clustering: The people will work together to group theater industry challenges gathered from the online survey into categories and then provide a title for each category.
- Visualize the Vote: Each person will vote on the challenge they want to focus on for the remainder of the session.
- Rose, Bud, Thorn: The group will work together to identify positive factors, negative factors, and opportunities for the challenge topic chosen during voting.
- Concept Poster: The group will dive deeper into the challenge by creating a virtual collage of pictures, phrases, and other important information.

We anticipate that your participation in this online design-thinking session presents no greater risk than everyday use of the Internet. Some of the questions we will ask you as part of this study may make you feel uncomfortable. You may refuse to answer any of the questions, take a break or stop your participation in this study at any time. These sessions will be video recorded, but the video will only be retained for academic validation purposes. The video will not be used in the final report, and any information you provide during the session will not be associated with you in the final report without consent. For example, the student researcher may wish to use a quote from your conversation in the final report. A separate consent agreement will be used in that case.

The research team will work to protect your data to the extent permitted by technology. It is possible, although unlikely, that an unauthorized individual could gain access to your responses because you are responding online. This risk is like your everyday use of the internet.

There is no compensation from participating in this study nor are there any direct benefits to you for being in the study. If you decide to be in this study, what you tell us will be kept private. If we present or publish the results of this study, your name will not be linked in any way to what we present. If at any time you want to withdraw from this study, you may do so without penalty by contacting: Brian Long along67@radford.edu or Dr. Bruce Parsons Phone # 540-831-6628. If you have questions now about this study, please ask before you

sign this form. If you have any questions later, you may talk with Brian Long along67@radford.edu or Dr. Bruce Parsons Phone # 540-831-6628.

If this study raises issues that you would like to discuss with a professional, you may contact Brian Long along67@radford.edu or Dr. Bruce Parsons Phone # 540-831-6628.

The Radford University committee approved this study for the Review of Human Subjects Research. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject or have complaints about this study, you should contact Ben Caldwell, Ph.D., Institutional Official and Dean of the College of Graduate Studies and Research. Phone: 540.831.5723. bcaldwell13@radford.edu, 540-831-5470. It is your choice whether to be in this study. What you choose will not affect any current or future relationship with Radford University.

If all of your questions have been answered and you would like to take part in this study, then please sign below.

Signature

Printed Name(s)

Date

I/We have explained the study to the person signing above, have allowed an opportunity for questions, and have answered all of his/her questions. I/We believe that the subject understands this information.

Signature of Researcher(s)

Printed Name(s)

Date

Note: A signed copy of this form will be provided for your records.