

# *The Audacity of Relevance*

## TACA DIY Book Club Discussion Guide

**This Discussion Guide is a starting place – you can use any of these questions, add your own, or crowdsource from your group. We hope they spark ideas, generate conversations, and help you have a great time in your discussion group!**

1. In the introduction, Sarian asks the question **“What is more important in the arts: the intention of the artist or the perception of the audience?”** (p. 13)
  - Where do you stand on this question?
  - How does this question connect with your own experiences in the arts and culture community?
2. In Chapter 3, Sarian states that “we need to believe in our organizations’ civic responsibility before we think about our artistic mandate.” He goes on to pose the question **“How do we change the DNA of our organizations so drastically and so rigorously that more communities feel welcome – not because we are overly committed to outward manifestations of inclusion but because of the change that is taking place at a very deep and internal level?”**
  - How does this question reflect your experiences in the arts, either as an audience member or an arts worker?
  - What do you think is the relationship between these two ideas? Where would you like to see that relationship go?
3. At the start of *Programming* (Chapter 4), Sarian asks Deborah Cullinan **“If the arts are truly transformational to the DNA of communities and societies, then why are so many arts organizations struggling to survive?”**
  - How would you answer this question?
  - Sarian states that the answer lies in how organizations have taken up the mantle of programming. How does his support of this answer land with you?
4. Chapter 5, *Messaging*, introduces the idea of **three concentric circles of arts marketing:**
  - Performance Marketing, which sells tickets and generates earned revenue
  - Institutional Messaging, connecting the programs to the organization’s value proposition and to each other



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- Advocacy Messaging, which encourages people to develop arts-going habits and connects the work of the organization with the larger arts community and with the public it serves

Can you identify these types of messages from an organization you know well? How do you see these three circles working together, and is anything missing from this model?

What type of messages do you think capture most of your attention, and what do you wish you heard more often?

5. Answer Sarian's question from Chapter 6, *Education*, "**What do you think would happen to the DNA of the organization if the Director of Education was in charge of everything?... What if the artistic commitment was in service of an educational mission?**" (p. 88)
  - How would this setup change the experience for both adults and children?
  - What points from your discussion could you apply to your work or your experience with arts organizations?
  - How do you think this shift in perspective might change how arts organizations engage with artists?
  - What long-term shifts might happen if education was placed at the forefront of arts work?
6. What evolution would you like to see in arts fundraising that speaks to Sarian's point about "**inspiring philanthropy as opposed to just begging for philanthropy**" (p. 121)?
  - How might these evolutions intersect with earlier discussions about marketing and messaging?
  - What do you observe in Dallas' philanthropic environment that indicates either the need for a major shift in fundraising approach or an indication that a shift is underway?
  - What motivates your own giving, and how might you apply that lens to arts organizations' fundraising asks?
7. How could the ideas in Chapter 8, *Advocacy*, influence how you talk about the arts? What about the arts organizations where you work or participate?
  - What are different types of arts advocacy that you observe in your community? What would you like to see?
  - Do you consider yourself an arts advocate?
    - i. If yes, how do you engage in arts advocacy?
    - ii. If not, what would it mean for you to become an arts advocate?



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8. In Chapter 9, *People and Culture*, Sarian asked his team to consider the question **“How do we change who we are to the outside world so it becomes an extension of who we are to each other?”** Pick an arts organization and try to guess its values based on your experiences with it.
  - What values are available on the organization's website or other materials? Did they match your experiences or were there differences?
  - What are some examples of organizations where the internal culture is clear from the outside?
  - What are some examples of how arts organizations display their values in their work, their communications, or other messaging?
  
9. Sarian states in Chapter 10, *Leadership*, that a new kind of arts organization leader is **“someone who can build bridges between artists, audiences, and the resources required to develop a sector that outlives any one individual.”**
  - What would that kind of leadership look like to you? Is that similar or different to what you've experienced?
  - Can you identify people who already lead in this way? What are their organizations doing differently than others?
  - Is anything missing from Sarian's model of a new kind of leader? What could you add to this description?
  
10. Chapter 11, *Design*, centers around the physical spaces where art experiences happen. He realizes that Arts Commons needed **“to transform who we are and what we mean to Calgary, and then whatever we design needs to be the physical representation of who we've become.”**
  - Think of an example of an arts and culture space and discuss its design. Is it welcoming, challenging, inspiring, etc.?
  - What makes a space uniquely representative of an organization? How does an arts and culture organization make its physical manifestation clearly connected to that organization?
  
11. Where did you most agree or disagree with Sarian's statements about the field? Did you feel anything was missing from his assessment?
  
12. What is your biggest takeaway from reading and discussing *The Audacity of Relevance*? How will it affect your work in the arts or your engagement with arts and culture?