Data-Driven Decision Making: Leveraging Research to Strengthen Arts Organizations and Educational Programs

As arts administrators in higher education navigate increasingly complex challenges—from financial sustainability to workforce development and equity concerns—data-driven insights have become essential tools for strategic planning and advocacy. SMU DataArts, a research center at Southern Methodist University, invites colleagues to explore how recent research on the arts and culture sector can inform institutional decision-making and program development. This roundtable will examine current trends affecting cultural workers and organizations, including financial and operational patterns, workplace culture dynamics within nonprofit arts, and evolving artist needs. Participants will discuss how data insights can be applied to challenges at their own institutions, from resource allocation and curriculum design to community engagement and DEI initiatives. We'll share our methodologies for gathering and interpreting sector data, discuss approaches for collaborating across disciplines to address critical questions, and consider how higher education arts programs can contribute to, and benefit from, national research efforts. This discussion welcomes deans and administrators interested in evidence-based approaches to strengthening their institutions and building connections between academic programs and the broader arts ecosystem.

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