

**2016 YANJEP Client Research Project**

**Final Report**

October 7, 2016

**BACKGROUND**

In order to increase reach, sales, and number of children served, Young Audiences New Jersey Eastern Pennsylvania (YANJEP) seeks to understand the factors that influence educators' decisions to book assemblies and residencies. To achieve this, YANJEP has engaged communications consultant Ruth Zamoyta (RZ) to develop, implement, and analyze client surveys and interviews. For the Phase I of the two-phase study, an online survey was designed to gauge the motivations, attitudes, and behavior of current and lapsed clients. The second phase entailed in-depth interviews of select clients, to probe more deeply into survey findings and to answer questions that were not suitable for survey format. The following is the final report, in five sections:

- Page 1: Questions to be Explored
- Page 2: Survey Results (submitted August 26, 2016)
- Page 15: Conclusions from Survey (submitted August 26, 2016)
- Page 17: Results from Interviews
- Page 30: Conclusion

**QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE**

YANJEP and RZ worked together to compile the following list of questions to explore:

1. Who identifies the need for extra-curricular programming and when? Who decides which programs to book?
2. How many assemblies and residencies does the school or organization host? Has the number of annual programs been fluctuating over the last 3 years? Has the nature of the programs changed (science v. art, single performance v. residency, etc.)? If so, why? What are the opportunities and risks?
3. What factors influence the decision to book an event with YANJEP?

- a. Precedents, tradition, pre-existing guidelines
  - b. Personal interest/value
  - c. To fulfill to state-mandated curriculum
  - d. Recommendation (from whom?)
  - e. Track record/reputation
  - f. Ease of purchase/customer service
  - g. Pricing
  - h. Breadth of choice
  - i. Availability/scheduling
  - j. Diversity initiative
  - k. Availability of accessible programming/accommodations
  - l. Supplemental tools such as study guides, video tutorials, lesson-plan banks, etc.
  - m. Other factors
4. When is a decision made? Is it anchored to another event such as a school board meeting? At a certain time in the school year? During a meeting or home late at night?
  5. For schools or organizations that have been interested in booking an event with YANJEP but decided not to, what were the barriers?
  6. Who/what are YANJEP's competitors? What alternatives were considered in the purchasing process? What are the qualities of YANJEP that set them apart from the rest, and make clients choose YANJEP? What do clients like/dislike about the booking process and the programming?
  7. How do clients hear about YANJEP? Are there hidden markets that YANJEP has not yet tapped? Or is the field saturated?

### **SURVEY RESULTS**

Between August 2 and August 24, 2016, 138 respondents visited the survey website, and between 120 and 125 individuals completed the questions. The survey was made available electronically only, and YANJEP promoted it through e-blasts from Executive Director Michele Russo to targeted clients. The following is a summary of the survey results. At times the data have been segmented and cross-referenced, resulting in fewer than 100 respondents. Wherever 100 or more responses were collected, the data is considered significant, and can be extrapolated within a slight margin of error to apply to all clients. The results from any questions answered by fewer than 100 respondents are not significant, but may suggest a trend.

**1. Who identifies the need for extra-curricular programming and when? Who decides which programs to book?**

Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent the input of administrators, teachers, PTO reps, parents, students, and board members influences what assemblies and workshops are booked by their school or organization. As Figure 1 shows, “Administrators” was the most popular answer, with 61 respondents (50%) indicating that they are extremely influential, and 33 (27%) indicating that they are somewhat influential. “Teachers” were also shown to be strong influencers, with 45 (37%) of respondents stating they are extremely influential and 46 (37%) stating they are somewhat influential. “PTO representatives” and “Students” followed closely behind. In the 17 open-ended comments, again teachers and administrators were mentioned, for the most part. The staff of YANJEP noted that in perusing the names of the respondents, it was clear that there were more administrators who completed the survey than PTO reps, even though a good number of PTO reps were invited to take the survey. This suggests that administrators are more invested in the process than PTO reps.

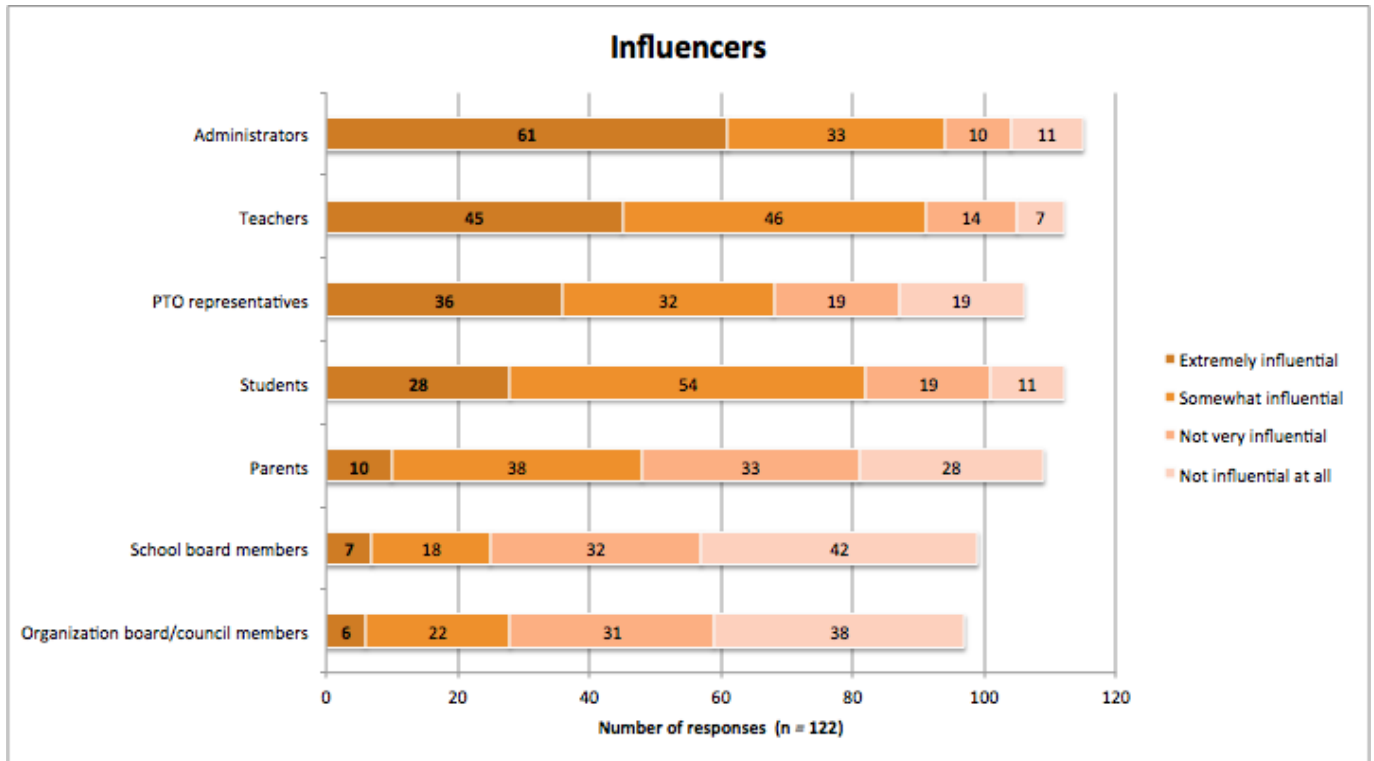


Figure 1

Recommendations:

- In the interview phase, RZ will explore more deeply the decision-making process, asking interviewees to describe the process of booking in order to gauge how these different constituents affect the decision.
- When combining the “extremely influential” and “somewhat influential” scores, “Students” top “PTO reps.” This might suggest an opportunity for YANJEP to focus messaging on student satisfaction, through testimonials, photos, and data. In the interview phase, RZ will ask more about the student influence.

**2. How many assemblies and residencies does the school or organization host? Has the number of annual programs been fluctuating over the last 3 years? Has the nature of the programs changed (science v. art, single performance v. residency, etc.)? If so, why? What are the opportunities and risks?**

Respondents were asked how many assemblies or performances in various subject categories their schools or organizations hosted in the past three school years. They were asked to include school-wide and small-group assemblies, curricular and extracurricular assemblies, and assemblies/performances booked through YANJEP as well as other vendors. The findings suggest that there are far more arts assemblies than history, STEM, or character-building assemblies. In fact, 24% of respondents indicated that they had no history assemblies in the past three years, 21% said no character-building assemblies, and 35% said no STEM assemblies (see Figure 2).

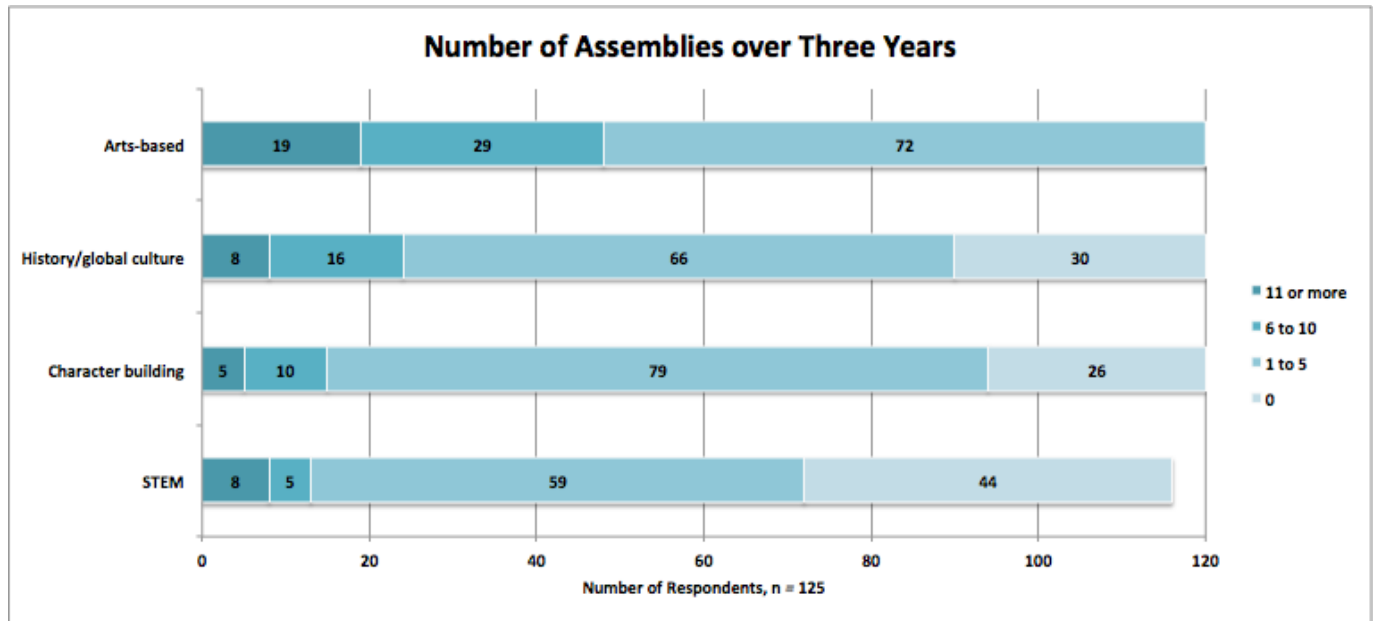


Figure 2

We asked respondents if the number of assemblies/performances by subject category has increased, stayed the same, or decreased over the past three years. Across the board the number of assemblies has stayed the same or increased, with STEM assemblies increasing at a slightly higher rate than other disciplines (see Figure 3). The comparatively low number of STEM assemblies over the past three years combined with the reported higher increase in STEM assemblies suggests that demand for STEM assemblies is increasing at a rapid rate.

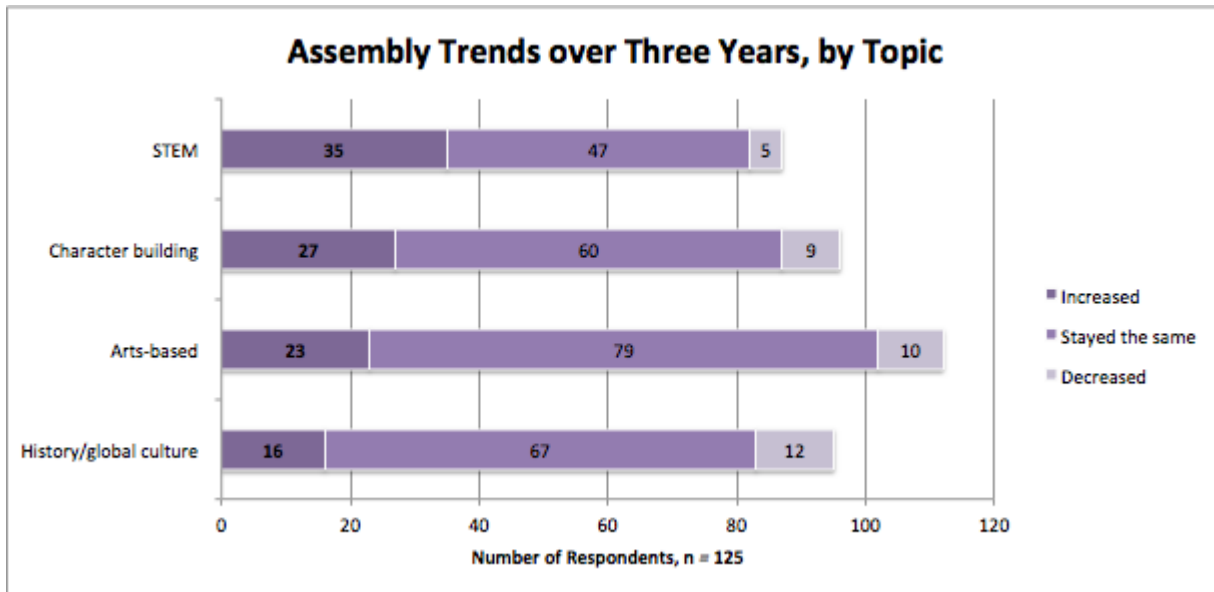


Figure 3

Respondents were asked the same questions about residencies and workshops. Results show that respondents in general host slightly more arts-based residencies than in the other disciplines (see Figure 4).

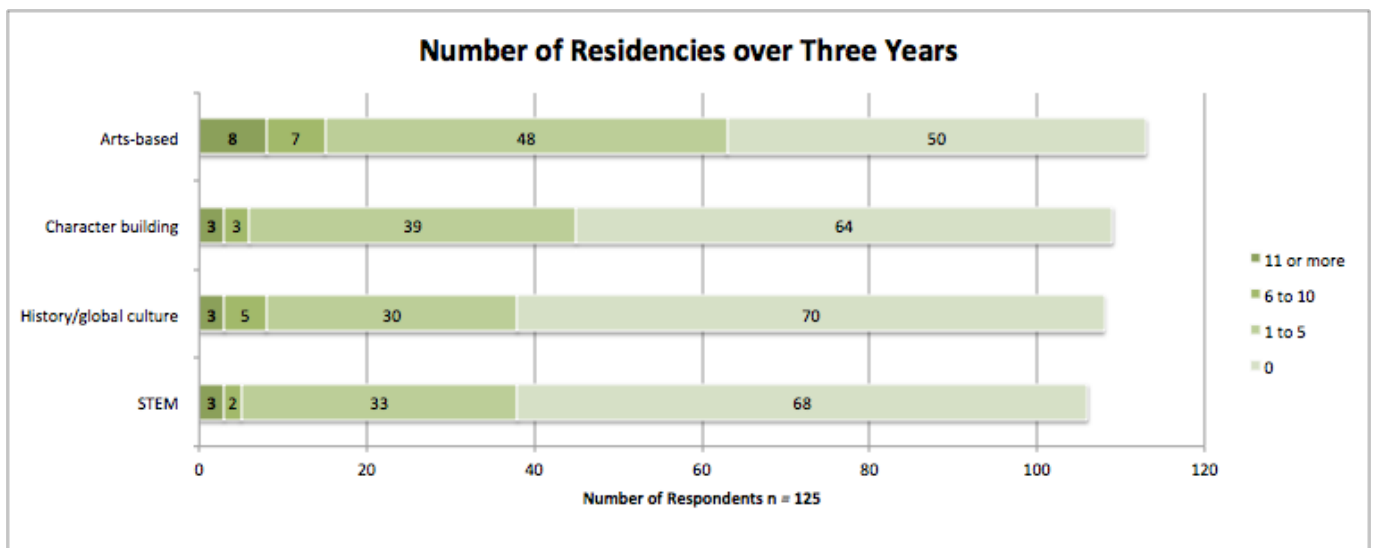


Figure 4

According to respondents, the number of residencies hosted has largely remained the same or slightly increased, across all subjects, with STEM residencies increasing at a slightly higher rate (see Figure 5).

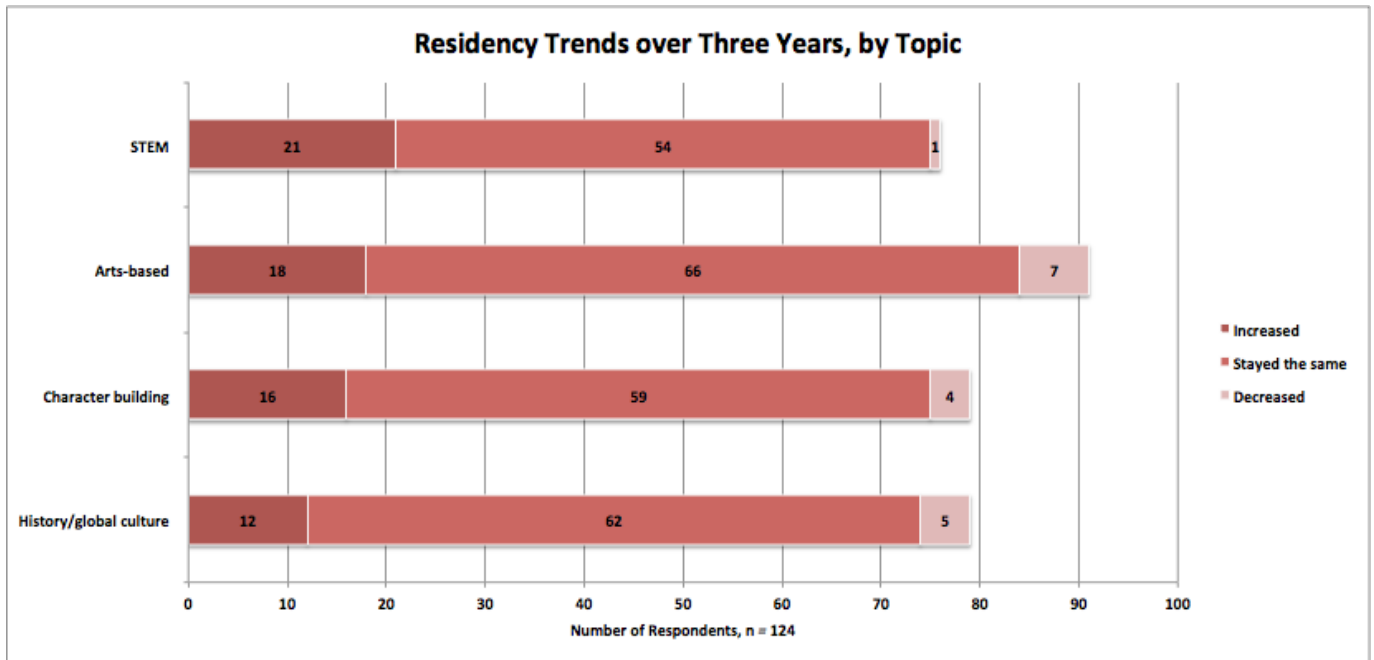
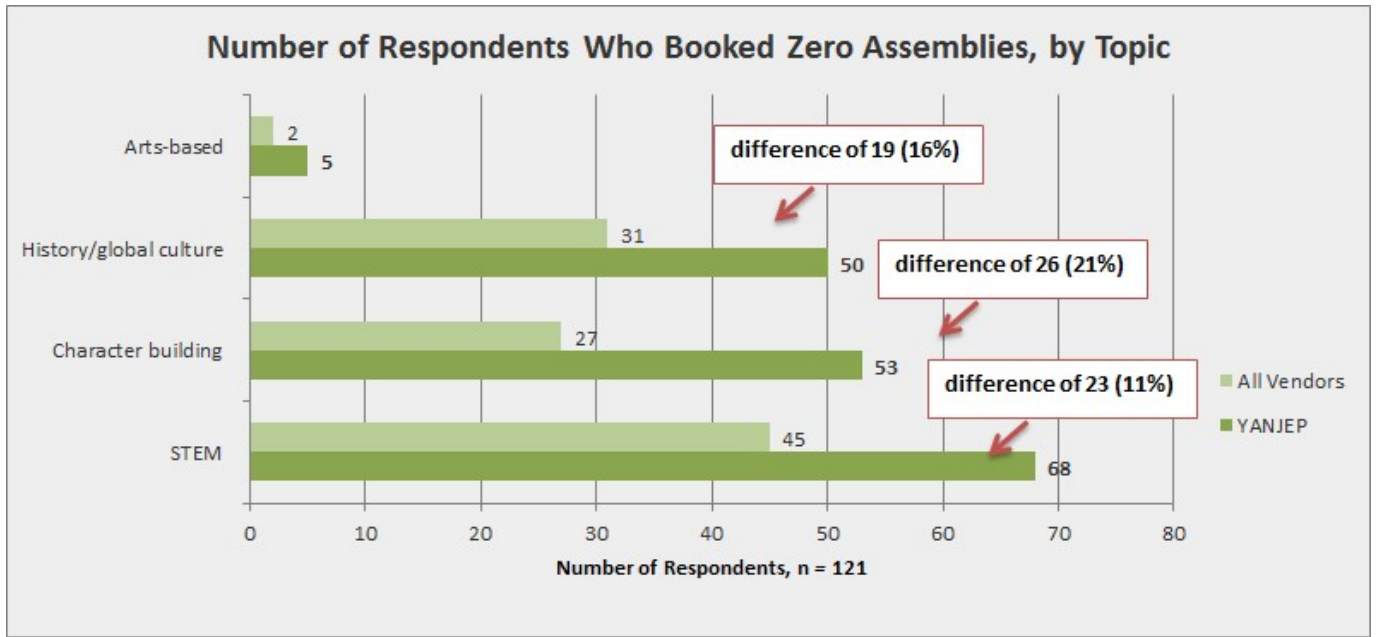


Figure 5

Respondents were also asked how many assemblies and residencies they booked over the past three years from YANJEP. The results (Figure 6 and 7) show that YANJEP is by far the leading provider among respondents to this survey. The most discrepancy can be seen in non-arts assemblies, and in STEM residencies. Nineteen respondents (16%) who booked history/global culture assemblies did not book with YANJEP, 26 (21%) who booked character building assemblies did not book with YANJEP, 23 (11%) who booked STEM assemblies did not book with YANJEP, and about 22 respondents (18%) who booked STEM residencies did not book with YANJEP.



*Figure 6*



*Figure 7*

Recommendations:



- RZ will ask interviewees whether they are inclined to add even more STEM-based programs in the future, and if an increase in assemblies or residencies in one field will necessitate a decrease in another field.
- RZ will speak with respondents who indicated that they booked residencies and assemblies (especially STEM) through vendors other than YANJEP, and ask who provided those residencies and what was the rationale behind the choice.

**3. What factors influence the decision to book an event with YANJEP?**

As Figure 8 shows, when respondents were asked what factors influence their decision to book assemblies or residencies, three factors clearly rose to the top: price, reputation, and the presence of a diversity element. It is worth noting that of the 121 people who responded to this question, 11 wrote-in comments indicating that ties to the curriculum are an important factor. This suggests that if “Ties to the curriculum” had been offered as a response in the multiple-choice question, it would have had a response in the mid-range, along with “Convenience,” “Teacher interest” and “Precedents.”

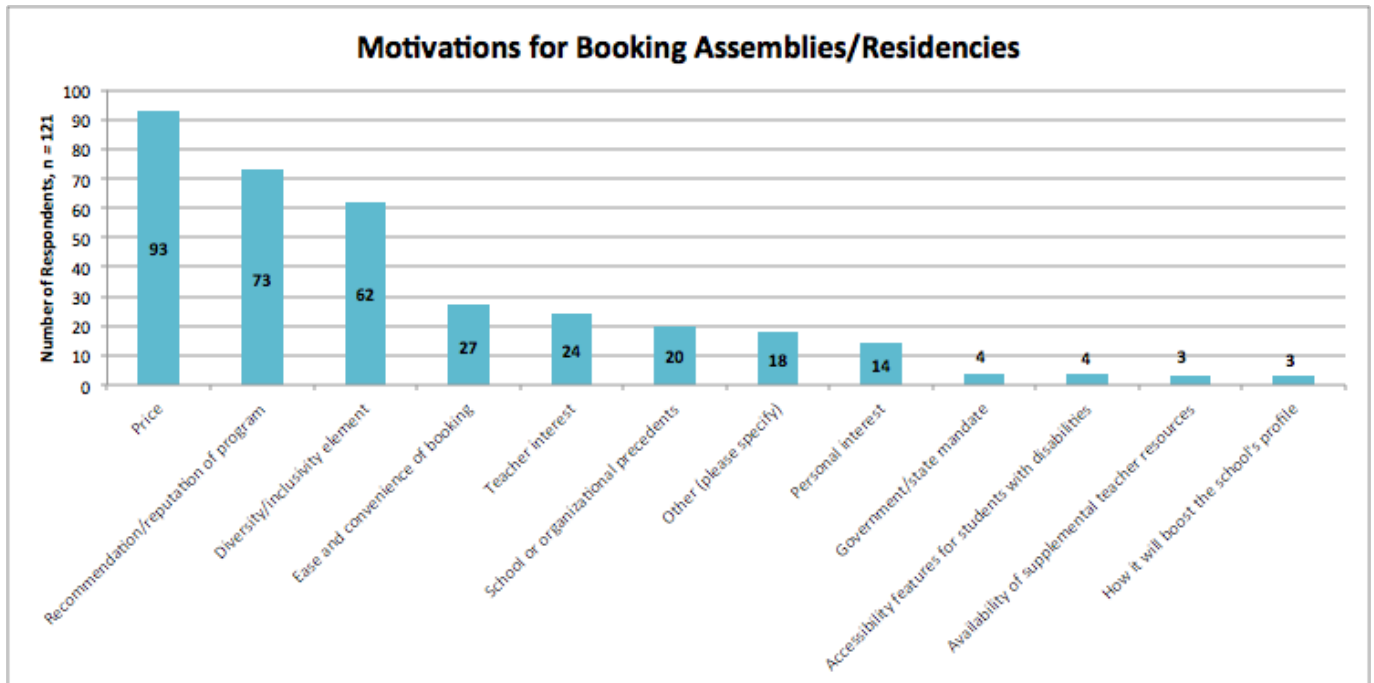


Figure 8

Whereas price and reputation of the program are to be expected as motivators, “Diversity/inclusion element,” which was chosen by 51% of respondents, is worth serious consideration by YANJEP when it comes to

programming, staffing, communications, and marketing. Also, as YANJEP begins to develop its added-value component of providing supplemental materials like lesson plans, it should be noted that only 3 respondents chose “Availability of supplemental teacher resources” as a main motivation.

Recommendations:

- The desire for a diversity element in programming should be communicated to presenters and instructors. Descriptions of the programs in print and digital publications should emphasize the diversity and inclusion facets of each program. Culturally diverse performers and students should be featured in photographs on communications. YANJEP might also consider developing a campaign to position itself as the only assembly provider in the area that celebrates diversity in all of its programs.
- RZ will explore educators’ desire for supplemental resources more in-depth during the interview phase.

**4. When is a decision made? Is it anchored to another event such as a school board meeting? At a certain time in the school year? During a meeting or home late at night?**

Respondents were asked, “When are decisions made to book assemblies and workshops?” They were given a range of answers and were asked to select all that apply. In Figure 9, the responses “Varies from year to year” and “Every year at the same time” appear in green. Of the 94 respondents who chose one of these two options, 63% indicated that their timing varies, whereas 37% indicated that it is consistent from year to year. In terms of seasons, summer and fall have the edge on the spring.

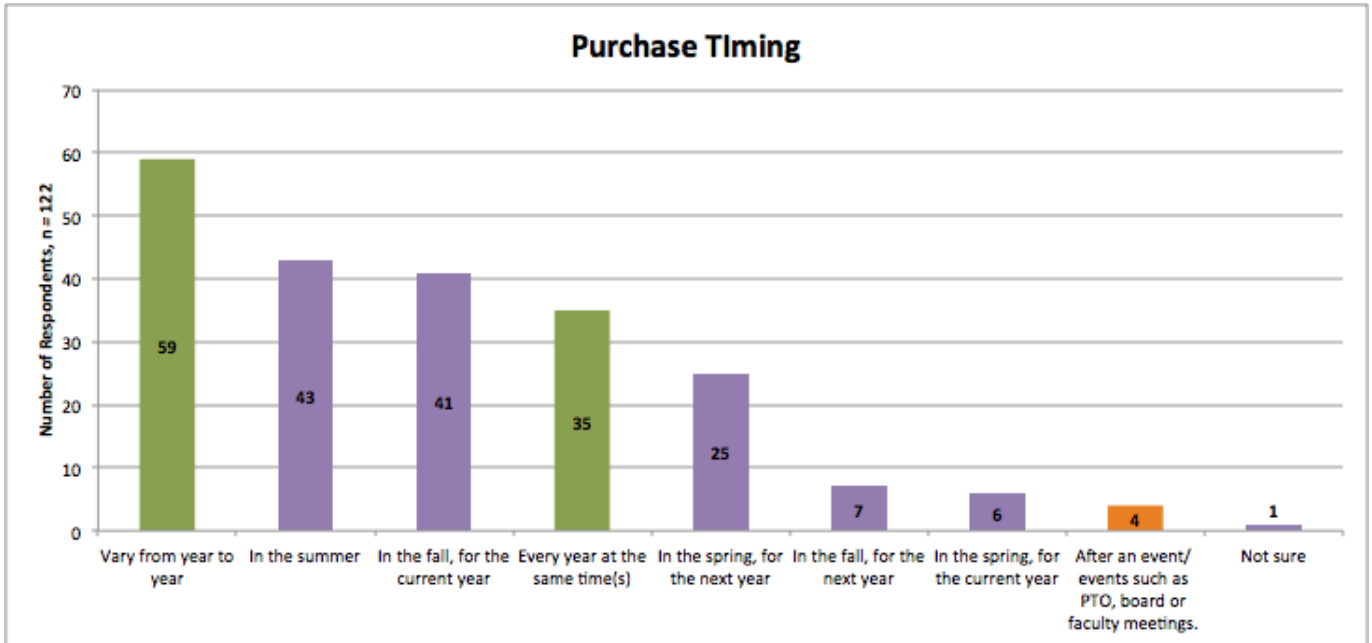


Figure 9

Respondents were also asked to what extent assemblies and workshops rely on certain types of funding, if they are not already covered in operating budgets (see Figure 10). It is worth noting that 26% of respondents claim that assemblies and residencies are contingent on fundraising.

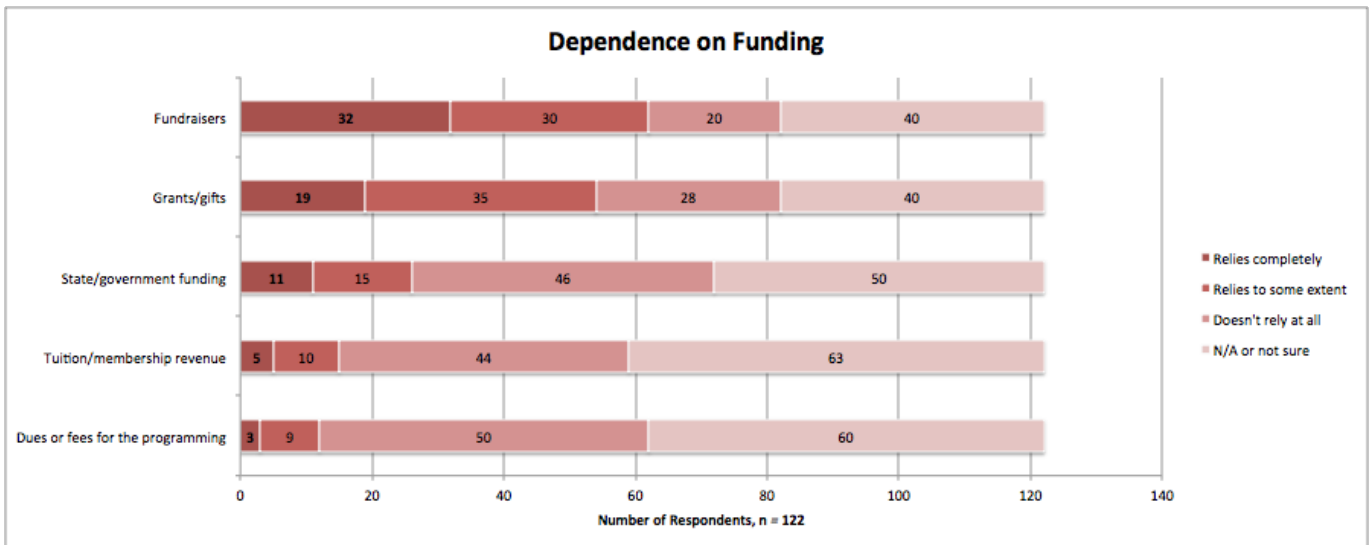


Figure 10

In looking at the responses from schools or organizations that indicated they are non-public, there is not much difference in funding dependency from the overall totals (see Figure 11).

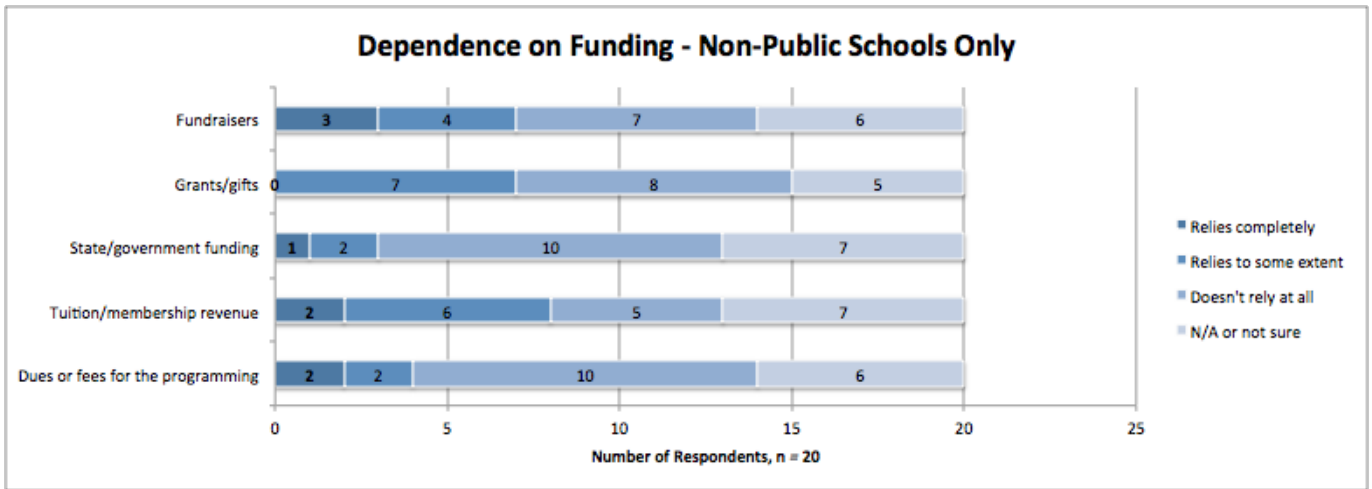


Figure 11 Recommendations:

- Marketing efforts should be strong in the summer and fall. Individual clients' timing patterns should be noted on client records, to determine which ones book at the same time every year.
- YANJEP should think about how it can help clients have successful fundraisers, such as by providing promotional materials, links to videos of its programming, or brief presentations at fundraising events.
- In the interview phase, RZ will more closely examine the path to purchase, and determine what communications from YANJEP would be most influential, at what point along that path.

**5. For schools or organizations that have been interested in booking an event with YANJEP but decided not to, what were the barriers?**

Survey results show that 31% of respondents have been interested in booking an event with YANJEP but decided not to. By far, the reason was pricing, as shown in Figure 12.

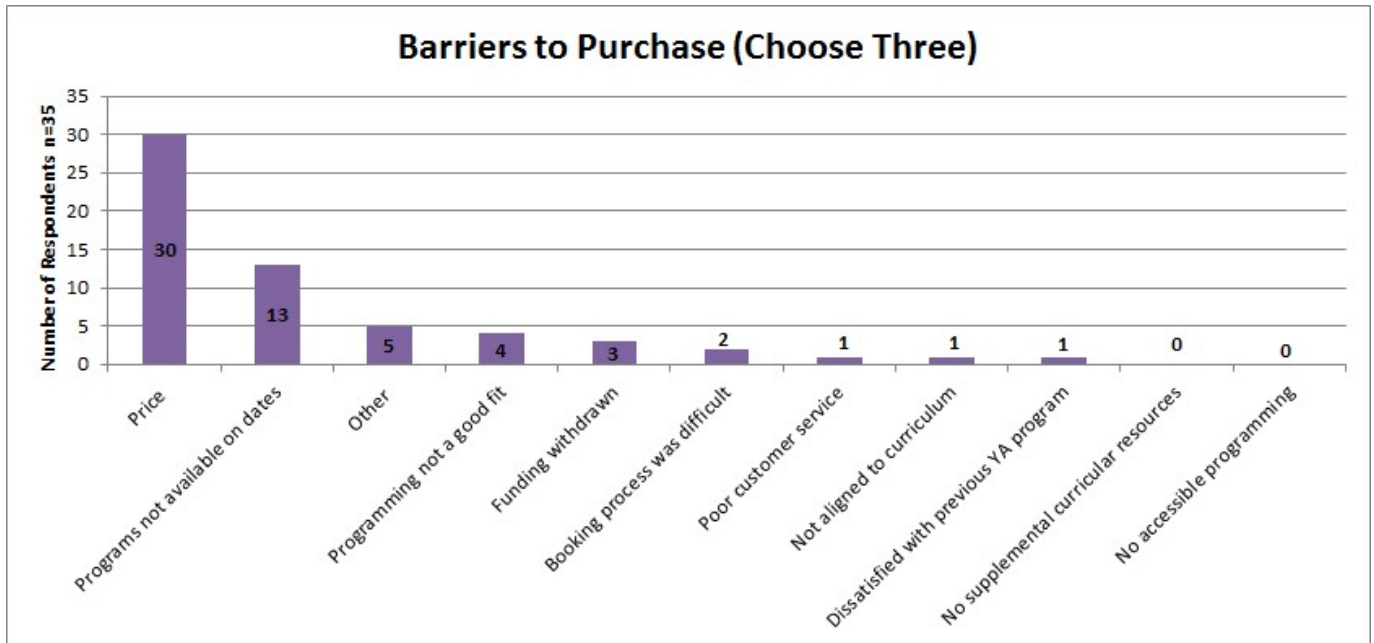


Figure 12 Recommendations:

- RZ will ask interviewees if they chose alternatives to YANJEP, and what the pricing difference was.
- YANJEP might want to look into new pricing structures for clients on a tighter budget.
- In the comments in questions 19 and 20 there were three specific concerns that YANJEP might want to address directly since the respondents gave permission to contact them. Two were complaints about performers; another was a concern that the catalogue has not been received.

**6. Who/what are YANJEP's competitors? What alternatives were considered in the purchasing process? What are the qualities of YANJEP that set them apart from the rest, and make clients choose YANJEP? What do clients like/dislike about the booking process and the programming?**

As for perceived benefits of YANJEP, the organization has high marks across the board, and there was even general satisfaction regarding price, as seen in Figure 13.

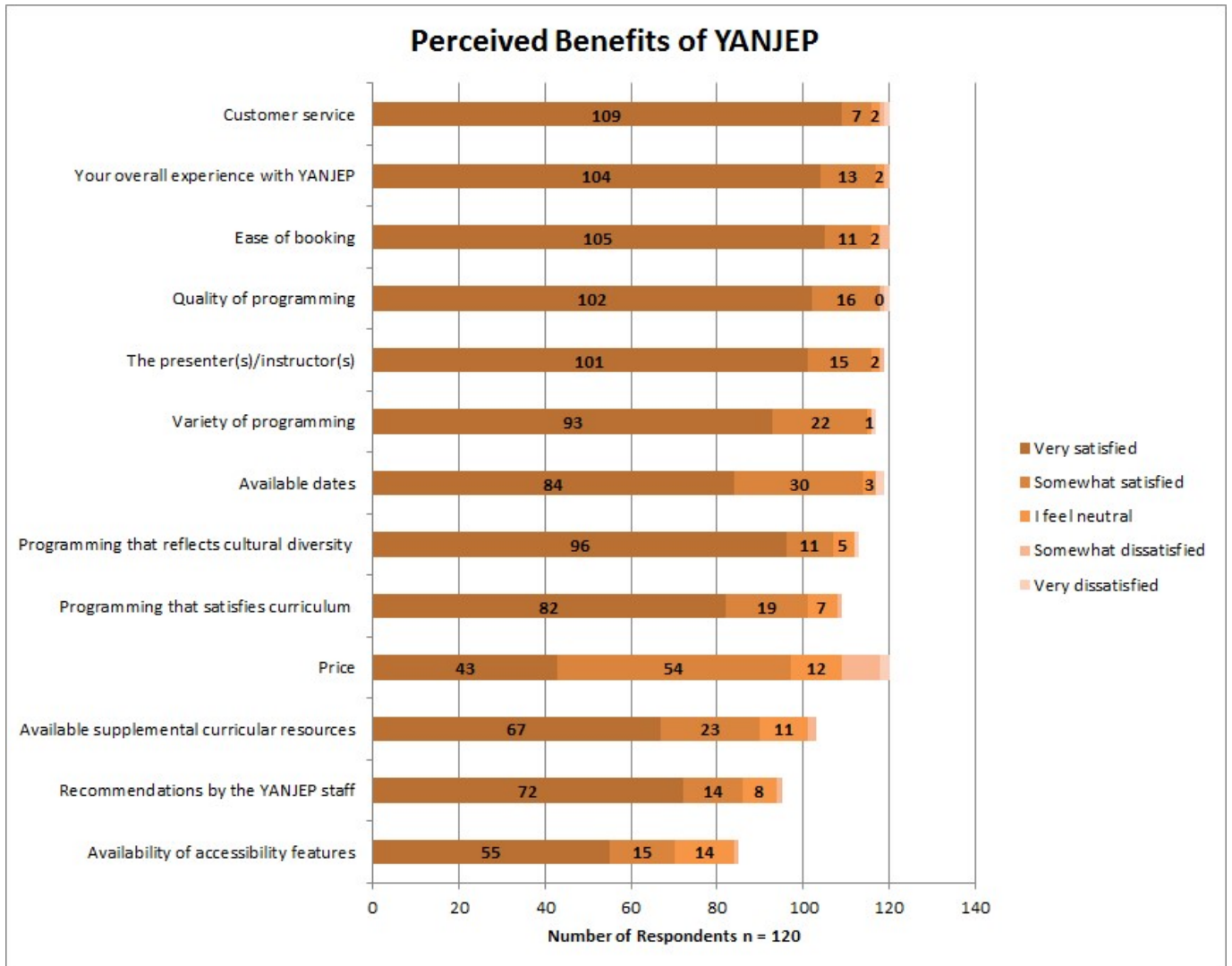


Figure 13 Recommendations:

- Competitors and competing factors will be explored in the interviews.
- No one factor pops out in terms of main benefits of working with YANJEP, so I would recommend focusing on the insights about diversity shown in Figure 8.
- RZ will dig deeper into clients' perceptions of the booking process during the interview phase.

7. How do clients hear about YANJEP? Are there hidden markets that YANJEP has not yet tapped? Or is the field saturated?

Respondents were given a list of different media and asked to select all the ways in which they have heard about YANJEP. As Figure 14 shows, “Word of mouth from within the school or organization” and “The YANJEP catalogue” have the most effective reach. The vehicles and media listed by respondents who chose “Other” corroborated the other answer options: referrals, showcases, and having a long history with YANJEP were mentioned most often.

The interesting thing about these responses is that although this was a “select all that apply” question, there were only 213 selections made among 120 individuals, which means most chose just one or two media. This suggests that very few touch points are necessary before deciding to book an event: most often only one or two. Also note that marks are low for the methods whereby non-customers discover YANJEP, such as Internet search, inter-organizational word of mouth, direct mail, social media, and external links.

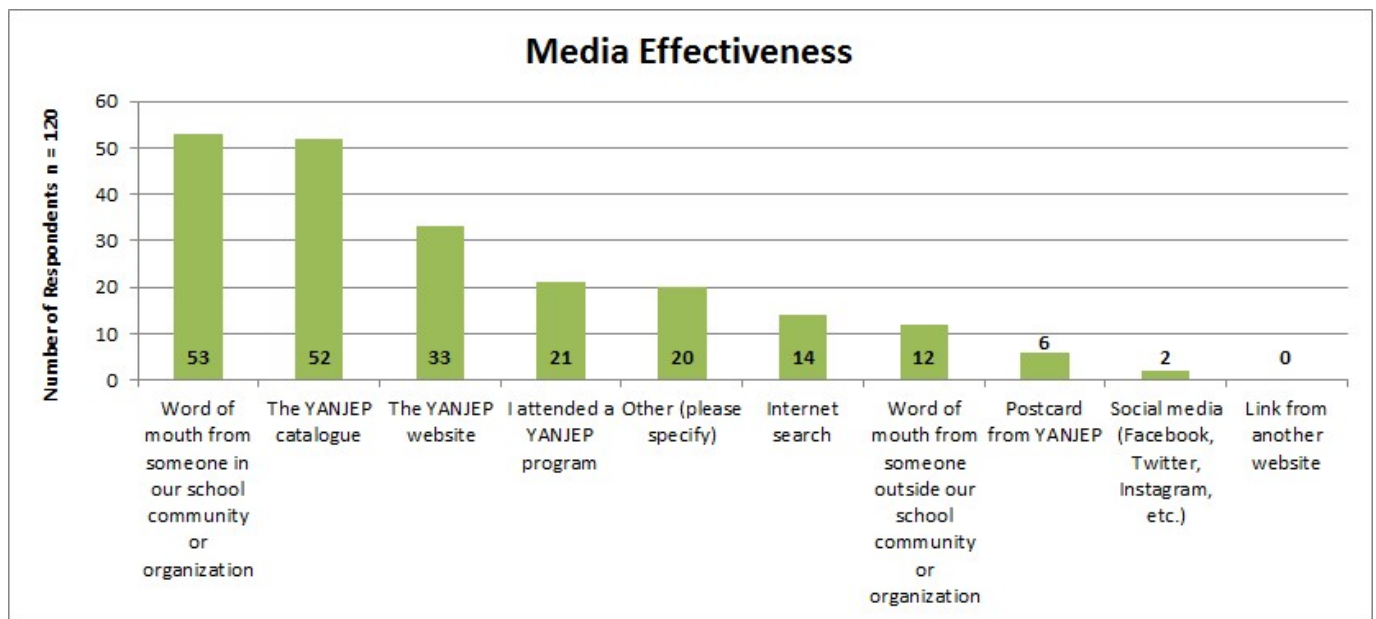


Figure 14 Recommendations:

- When developing communications, YANJEP should be mindful that the viewer is likely to make his/her decision on the spot, and therefore there must be a direct and clear path to purchase. This might mean sending not one but three or four catalogues to administrators and educators, encouraging them to distribute them to their colleagues. Phone number and website booking page should be prominent on every page of the catalogue. Contact information should be prominent on every webpage as well as “Book Now” buttons, and instructors/performers should visit a school with a stack of cards or flyers for teachers and administrators.

- RZ will explore through interviews how YANJEP might penetrate markets outside existing circles.

### **CONCLUSIONS FROM SURVEY**

YANJEP has a strong seal of approval from its clients, and the main concern among lapsed clients is that the cost of its programming is prohibitive. YANJEP should explore alternative pricing options. As it seems the number of arts assemblies and residencies has been generally increasing or remaining the same, and customer satisfaction is high, YANJEP should explore offering programming in other areas where the demand is growing, such as STEM. Also, with many schools and organizations stating that diversity is a factor they look for when they book assemblies and workshops, YANJEP should ensure that diversity continues to be reflected in its programming, staff, and communications. Lastly, since communications within existing circles have been more effective than communications to new markets, Phase II will focus on discovering where those new markets are and how to reach them effectively.



## INTERVIEW RESULTS

Ten survey respondents were interviewed anonymously, and asked some or all of the following questions:

1. How large is your school? How would you characterize the student population? Do you have many arts assemblies each year? How often do you use YA to supply assemblies or workshops? Do you use other vendors or providers?
  - a. Explore reasons for choosing alternative vendors without seeming predatory.
2. YA is trying to understand the assembly decision-making and booking process. What does that look like at your school?
  - a. Explore who is involved in the process and what times of year are key.
  - b. If students were noted to be influencers, in what capacity?
3. The survey indicated that diversity and inclusion are top motivating factors when choosing assemblies. Is this so for your school? When you hear the terms “diversity and inclusion,” what do they mean to you?
4. In the survey, some respondents noted that links to the curriculum were an important factor in choosing assemblies. Is that true at your school?
  - a. Explore whether they are referring to the standard curriculum, special theme months, etc.
  - b. TEACHERS: Do you choose or recommend assembly programs that can be integrated into the curriculum? Do you look for resources and materials that will help with this?
    - i. What types of resources would be most useful? Ex: lesson plans, study guides, tips for integrating, context sheets, etc.
5. The survey indicated an increase in STEM/STEAM assemblies and workshops. Is this the case in your school?
  - a. Explore attitudes toward and trends in STEM/STEAM programming and opportunities for YA.
6. Would you recommend YA to another school? In your own words, what is the top reason that a school should book with YA?
  - a. YA offers discounts for referrals but finds that only a few schools take advantage of that. What do you think is the reason behind this?
7. Like many businesses, YA is increasing its social media activity. Do you and the influencers at your school use social media to help you make choices for your school?
8. The YA national network is exploring whether to offer credentialing to teaching artists. Do you believe that your school would be more likely to choose credentialed artists for workshops and assemblies, when given the choice?
9. The survey indicated that many schools rely on fundraisers to subsidize assemblies. Is this the case in your school?
  - a. Get details and explore whether they would welcome help from YA and what sort of help.
  - b. YA is considering piloting an arts fundraising program that involves students, much like “Jump Rope for the Heart.” Other YAs across the country have successfully held “Run for the Arts” fundraisers for arts assemblies. Is this something that would work at your school?

The following are the findings from the interviews in response to each set of questions:

## 1. Competing vendors

After getting the basic information from the interviewees, such as school characteristics and their roles in booking assemblies/residencies, RZ asked how often they use YANJEP, what other vendors they use, and why. There were two main reasons for using other vendors: lower price and availability of STEM programs. One interviewee was a librarian, and she chooses alternative vendors because she is under the impression that YANJEP does not cater to summertime programs, which is her season. Although she was the only one who noted scheduling as an obstacle, she represents a different category of client—one with a summer season.

Based on interviewee responses, it is clear that the main competition for YANJEP is booking directly with performers. One interviewee said that these performers can charge as little as \$300-\$350 per performance. Another interviewee said, “A YA assembly is \$1,500 or \$2,000. That’s half my budget.” Several interviewees said that they allot themselves one or two YANJEP assemblies per year, which takes up about half their budget, and they are able to get 3 or 4 performers with the remaining funds.

One interviewee who had experienced poor customer service at YANJEP remarked: “I book direct because I’m not paying the middle man. If you pay for a level of service that’s one thing, but when you’re trying to chase them down, it’s frustrating. I’m a full-time working mom. I don’t have to be chasing down people.”

The added value that sometimes justifies booking with YANJEP includes quality of programming, service, and vetting of performers. One interviewee described a “STEM Museum” program where the gym was transformed into a hands-on science museum with a 3D printer, an energy bike, robots, and more. “There are other venues similar to YA bringing in very good performances at half the price. There are YA performances where I can’t justify the price. Others are worth it. With the STEAM museum—if you saw enormity of it and what we did for the school—and it cost less than a YA acapella group.”

In terms of specific competing vendors, most interviewees were reluctant to name names, but the following vendors and showcase venues were mentioned: authors at the Morristown Festival of Books, the Bureau of Lecturers, Sneak Peeks, Morris Arts Showcase, ZooAmerica, Sciencetellers, Quitty Creek Nature Park, and Liberty Science Center. Based on an Internet search, it seems that Mobile Ed Productions provided the STEM

Museum. One interviewee noted that even though the performers are not local, “they all seem willing to come.”

One school counselor who is in charge of booking assemblies said that some of the assembly vendors she deals with yearly, so they automatically send her invoices and dates. It seemed that she appreciates the convenience and is unwilling or unable to look for new options each year. The librarian also mentioned that she has a history of booking with certain performers, so it is automatic each year.

It is worth noting that one interviewee did acknowledge the virtues of compensating artists fairly: “What YA offers is great, but the price is completely out of range. I want artists to be paid, but there are other companies and some artists are self-employed.”

#### Recommendations:

- Offer more creative pricing options.
- Communications should focus on the added value that the YANJEP brand carries that gives it the edge on direct bookings:
  - Reliability: In the case of a cancellation, YANJEP can suggest a replacement.
  - Diversity: In programming and in available artists.
  - Quality: As reflected in hundreds of testimonials and thousands of smiles.
  - Service: An entire team dedicated to ensuring you find a program that fits your needs and schedule.
- Make sure clients know if there is a discount for booking multiple events, and help them to compare the total cost with what they would be paying if they book directly with the performers.
- YANJEP might explore whether there is a hidden opportunity with summertime clients like libraries.

## **2. The assembly decision-making and booking process: Who and when?**

First, it was difficult to get a sense of why the timing of assembly and workshop booking was so varied and sometimes inconsistent within a school. One interviewee, when reciting the timeline of the process, interrupted herself when she got to September, and said, “Oh, I forgot to do that.” Also, it seemed like not all

assembly coordinators make decisions for the entire year at once. Some book at different times for fall assemblies and spring assemblies.

One PTO rep who has been student program chair for three years noted that every spring she sits down with the PTO president and the principal. They go through the calendar and talk through topic areas: “How many science assemblies? Music? Are there any specific performer requests? What have they enjoyed over the past years? They give me feedback. I spend a few weeks reaching out to performers, then get approval from the principal and PTO before scheduling the year.” The teachers have influence only if they happened to have mentioned something to the principal.

It is clear that the main motivator in choosing assemblies is students’ reactions: either reactions they have had in the past, or expected reactions based on seeing the programs in previews or videos. Almost every interviewee said she attends the assemblies. One interviewee said, “If I’m getting an expensive act, I make sure every kid gets to see it. I try to allot the same amount of money per grade. At the end of the year we have a fun celebration. We want to get everyone up and moving. It’s a great way to end the year—many schools do this. I am trying to find those acts that are creative, fun, multimedia.” Another, at a special-needs school, said: “I gauge the performance by [the children’s] responses. Some of our more verbal students say, “That was really cool.””

Another PTO rep had been chair of cultural arts for four years, and she is the sole decision maker, though she talks it through with her co-chair. She pays particular attention to cultural diversity and age-appropriateness, and will book programs throughout the year. For spirit week she books with YA. “We look for something fun and exciting for the kids for spirit week. We also run a big enrichment day at end of year. I try to connect the performance to the theme on that day.”

One PTO coordinator of assemblies and author visits described a systematic and thorough process. “I do my homework early on. My job is to pool ideas. I have a huge accordion file in my basement with mailers. I speak with other assembly coordinators in the district; I talk to other principals who tell me about cool assemblies they’ve seen. When I have ideas, I meet with the principal and the grade chairs. The teachers are in charge of making decisions for each grade. We share ideas. Occasionally some teachers might want an assembly just for their grade because they need something that aligns with their curriculum. Then I take the top five ideas and

make calls.” She also mentioned that she recently surveyed parents and asked them what kind of assembly they’d like. “They said they want a program that will teach their kids appropriate use of social media. That’s hard to find: a hybrid of social issues meets entertainment.”

One PTO rep who has been the cultural arts chair for three years said she asks the principal, vice principal, PTO president, and PTO vice president for input in the spring. She researches in the summer, and in the fall presents 12 options, asking them to narrow it to six. She then checks cost and availability and books three events. Teachers give feedback after the assembly.

Most of the interviewees were confident about the process and their ability to make decisions independently. One assembly coordinator, who is also the coordinator of the speech and language department, said she has been doing this for 20 years. Another interviewee said, “I know which companies to go to when going for a certain thing. Once a year I book with YA—it’s been that way for years. I know what the principal likes and doesn’t. I know what the school environment is like.”

One art and world-language teacher said the assembly coordinator role “fell into my lap” three years ago. In the summer she looks online for programs, looks in the YANJEP catalogue, then gives administrators the catalogue with her comments. “There’s no input from other teachers. It would be insane, and no one has ever complained.” It is interesting to note that this was the only assembly coordinator who seemed blasé about her role; the others took their role seriously and were enthusiastic.

The librarian said she gets together with a co-worker from another library in December, but she is the “sole decision maker.” She also mentioned that once a co-worker had called YANJEP but “they didn’t have an appropriate response about library programs in the summer, so I just dropped it.” She makes her decision at Sneak Peeks and usually books directly. She travels with four other librarians by van to Sneak Peeks in Philadelphia. “We drive home for 2 hours and talk about what we saw. Once I went to a school and saw 5 entertainers. I watch how the kids react. That’s when I get most of my ideas. I’ve used five to six acts in the past three to four years; I repeat.”

Only one PTO cultural arts rep noted that she confers heavily with teachers. She meets with several teachers and they talk about which programs they found successful and which didn’t fit into the curriculum.

Parents are also influencers or ambassadors. Sometimes they move to new school districts. Sometimes they join the PTO when their children graduate to middle school or high school. One school staff member who was interviewed works in one school district, but her children attend school in a different district. Interviewees were very willing to share information and speak honestly about YANJEP to colleagues and friends in other schools.

### Recommendations:

- Lead generation at events: ensure that YANJEP signage is prominent and palm cards available. Can you place a lawn sign in the front of the school on week before the assembly? Consider generating take-homes for students. Because of their willingness to pass on the good word about YANJEP, parents should be a target audience, as well.
- Each school is different in terms of influencers (one PTO rep heard about YANJEP from the nurse!), so make sure Principals, teachers (especially grade or subject chairs), guidance counselors, staff assembly coordinators, and PTO assembly coordinators, enrichment coordinators, and officers are all considered when determining target audiences.

### **3. Diversity**

Four interviewees gave input on diversity. One simply said, “The definition of diversity depends on what kind of school you are. Personally, I do like to get diversity in there.” Another said that when she chose diversity as a motivator in the survey, she was defining it as diversity in offerings: “In other words, not just theatrical or musical. I try to spread it around. A little history, art, technology.”

Two interviewees were more passionate, however, about ethnic and cultural diversity. One said, “I look to expose the kids to other cultures. Our school has a lot of kids from other countries and we want to celebrate the diversity of our community. We have booked assemblies on Mexican, American Indian culture, etc. In January we’ll have a Caribbean steel can band. We had Japanese drumming. It takes the kids out of their school day and into another world, into the depth of that culture. After the Japanese drumming assembly, the

kids went home and told their parents, who said, ‘Hey, that’s cool.’ I also focus on Americana. America has a lot to offer. It’s not just hip-hop, but different sounds from different regions.”

Another interviewee routinely looks for programs on Hispanic heritage and Black history. “I feel diversity is important because of the various cultures we have in our community. It’s import that each culture is represented equitably as much as possible. A passion of mine is promoting inclusion. Violence and prejudice stems from people not knowing each other’s cultures or languages. I feel like by bringing in diverse assemblies, that will lessen a lot of fights and arguments. I saw a YA program in another school on MLK or civil rights. It was really good. So my principal allowed me to check it out and we brought it to our school.”

#### Recommendations:

- Diversity was shown to be a strong motivator in the survey, and this was qualified in the interview as meaning both diversity in programming and diversity in culture and ethnicity. Both types of diversity should be emphasized in communications.

#### **4. Ties to the Curriculum and Teaching Resources**

Most interviewees remarked that ties to the curriculum and an educational component were important to assemblies and residencies, but some reserved some assemblies as a means of “release” or entertainment for the students. Only one interviewee said that her choices are not curriculum-based but rather based on themes such as environmental practices or anti-bullying. By “curriculum,” all interviewees meant state standards, but some assembly coordinators said that they do choose some assemblies based on general themes—usually the assemblies that are meant more to entertain than instruct.

One interviewee said, “Curriculum is *absolutely* an important factor. When I meet with teachers, they have so little time, so much to cover. They’re worried about fluff. So I make sure the assembly follows the curriculum. I call it ‘protecting school time.’ When I took this job I thought that assemblies were for fun and social awareness. But being educational is very important. Still, at the end of the year we have a fun celebration. We want to get everyone up and moving. It’s a great way to end the year—many schools do this. “Yet, even though they look for educational components, assembly coordinators also look for novelty (“I feel that we

should offer kids things they wouldn't be exposed to") and excitement ("I try to include performances that will make kids thrilled").

Most interviewees said that they do deliver the YANJEP study guides to teachers. Some said that the study guides seem to be helpful to teachers, but could not tell for sure. An equal number of interviewees said that they go unused. "Some guides are lengthy and teachers will never get to it, so we scale them down. But every teacher does get some form of your study guide. I don't think they do any activities because they don't have that class time to spare. But if we're doing something that ties into their curriculum that month, they'll raise it." Another interviewee said, "I think the study guides are great, but not something they delve into; they are very superficial. They're an intro to kids as to what they'll be seeing, but I don't know how much teachers utilize it. The way school is now with testing, there are not enough hours in the day for them to get in what they need to get in. Some teachers ask, 'Do we have to have this assembly?' It takes away from valuable teaching time." And another: "They don't need more materials. Lesson plans would be difficult for them to integrate—they already have a set schedule." Only one interviewee, a counselor, thought that teachers would be receptive to materials beyond the study guides.

#### Recommendations:

- Before developing additional classroom tools, YANJEP should consider hosting a focus group of teachers.
- Emphasize the educational element of programming, but make sure visuals show children enjoying themselves.

### **5. Attitudes toward STEM/STEAM**

Attitudes on STEM programming were varied. Of the five interviewees who discussed STEM programming, two indicated that they aren't particularly focused on STEM subjects when choosing assemblies and workshops. According to one: "There is no increase of STEM assemblies in our school. There are already programs in play supporting STEM: STEM camp, robotics classes, engineering class, CAD lab. It starts in elementary. I don't think it will trickle down to the assembly coordinator's mind."



The others are indeed looking for STEM or STEAM programming. The STEM Museum was already mentioned. Another school has plenty of STEM programs (“The kids are very happy—they love them”) but the assembly coordinator found that the students did not have much exposure to the arts and world culture, so she looks for STEAM programs. The librarian noted how popular STEM programs are with children: “They attract kids. Especially when they involve animals.” She also noted that, “We put the label ‘STEM’ on everything. But I’ve been doing STEM for years and we never called it that.”

#### Recommendations:

- Promote STEAM programs as STEM programs; consider designing a mini-catalogue of strictly STEAM programs. Emphasize that kids love STEM programs and the programs help school fulfill STEM mandates, but by adding the “A,” they are fun and engaging for everyone.
- Communications should emphasize that art is the liveliest and most energetic vehicle for teaching any subject, be it STEM, history, world culture, or social issues.

### **6. Main Benefits of YANJEP; Referrals**

From the survey it is clear that client satisfaction levels are very high. Although YANJEP had lower scores for price satisfaction, and pricing was indeed a major concern for most of the interviewees, two interviewees believed that the pricing was fair, or where it should be.

In the interviews, many clients highlighted their good relationships with the staff: One interviewee remarked: “We’ve been dealing with YA for a while. My relationship with Donna has been favorable since the onset. Carol and others, too. It’s easy to communicate and book a program. They’re very reliable. Never any glitches.” Another said, “Customer service is great. They always get back to me. They’re honest and send the video clips.”

It was clear that the high quality of YANJEP’s programs was the main competitive advantage, and the standard for judging this quality was happy kids. Some testimonials:

- I don’t have to take a gamble with YA.

- YA performers don't just play and leave. They explain the instrument, syncopation, masks. They involve the kids. The disabled class was mesmerized. It's great because we can include everybody.
- I did enjoy working with YA. The Perseus theatre group were very professional. The kids loved them. After the show was over they explained everything to the kids and answered the kids' questions. They were very easy to work with.

Quality is a paramount concern because the schools and the assembly reps can't afford a bad experience: "Our budget goes down every year. It's an issue. We don't want a flop." Another interviewee remarked: "When you have a dud performance, it's the worst. The kids only get four per year, and we just spent all that money." All interviewees indicated that they attend the programs they book, which is where assessment takes place. They also get feedback from teachers, parents, and students, immediately after the event, or at meetings. They sometimes hear from other parents when children go home and talk about what they saw.

In terms of referrals, unequal budgets seemed to be a barrier. Some assembly coordinators expressed reluctance to speak with their counterparts in other schools because they assume their budgets are prohibitive. One said: "We're all dealing with different budgets. There's no consistency." Another remarked: "There are four elementary schools in our district. We are the only one with a coordinator." Interviewees from Catholic and private schools noted that they are rather isolated. One interviewee said that she has virtually no contact with representatives from other schools, and if she does get the odd call, it is to see how she liked a certain performer, not a booking agency. A few interviewees were not aware of the referral program. Also, some interviewees suggested that a bulk discount would help—either for individuals or for multiple schools.

Two interviewees had negative experiences with YA. One, as previously mentioned, was the librarian: "A co-worker called YA. They didn't have an appropriate response about library programs in the summer. Also, YA didn't get back to her. I was going to ask YA to stop sending me the catalog. I'm not going to use you if you're not summer friendly, library friendly." One PTO rep said: "YA was very unresponsive. I tried to book a performer. There were significant delays in responding. I felt like having to chase down the person. Finally I reached out to the performer directly." Sales by YA to both of these clients have dropped or stopped. These are isolated cases, but they show how one bad experience can lead to lasting consequences, especially when the supply of performers and instructors is plentiful.

## Recommendations:

- In terms of communications strategy, YANJEP should focus on their distinctive qualities:
  - Diversity: Our variety of programs reflects the rich variety of children in our community and in our world
  - Reliability: The quantity and variety of our programs ensures that we will find the right fit for your schedule.
  - Service: Our staff puts clients first and delivers the information and materials that you need to make your YANJEP a positive experience.
  - Quality: Our performers have been vetted because our goal is your goal: Kids who had a fantastic time and learned something in the process.
- Several interviewees suggested giving group discounts for multiple schools. This might be a way for wealthier schools to feel they are helping their neighboring schools with lower budgets.

## **7. Social Media**

The general consensus from the interviews was that social media is not an effective way to advertise. Few interviewees use Facebook, and those who do are not looking for advertisements pertaining to their job or volunteering activities at their children's schools. "It wouldn't have occurred to me to use those channels," noted one interviewee. "It's so much easier to get information from other schools who have used performers. Mailings are highly effective. They all go into my folder. I look through them all to get ideas. The quality of YA's mailings and emails is very professional and strong. Very appealing."

Another interviewee said: "Social media not the way I find things for the school. This is just me. It might catch my attention, but I don't think it would influence whether I would click it. The average person isn't going to know what YA is unless you are involved in bringing it into a school. My interaction came from being on a committee, so that's how I'm aware of them. They do showcases, and I know their catalog."

This might be a generational factor, so YANJEP should consider further pushes on social media. The librarian remarked: "I'm 60 and not on social media at all. But on the other side, libraries are being pushed to do more social media. I need to post, so I ask a co-worker to do it for me."

Direct exposure to YA's programming, especially in the forms of showcases, visits to other schools, and videos, seemed to be the most influential means of communications. "I've lived here for a long time, I do a lot of volunteer work. I work in the neighboring school district. I will cold-call a school sometimes for suggestions. This summer our principal saw an act over the summer, and he said, 'Let's do it.' Now it's in every elementary school in the district. I reach out to Donna directly and ask, 'Can you give me the 5 top performers? She sends video clips and I show the principal the videos. That is great. Sometimes I use my own kids as a focus group. But I'm not on Facebook."

"The showcase is an excellent opportunity," said another interviewee. "I have to travel a little farther this year, but I will go. Each performance at the showcase is just long enough to know if it's going to work in the school. Invaluable. When I pass the baton to the next enrichment folks, I'm going to suggest attending the showcase. You see what's appropriate for students and appropriate for school."

Some interviewees said that their first encounter with YA was through the catalogue. Postcards were mentioned once, and two people mentioned doing Internet searches for performers and instructors.

#### Recommendations:

- The lack of engagement on social media should not deter YANJEP from posting content to and advertising on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. However, the content should not be an obvious sales pitch, but rather a showcase-style video presented as a news or announcement posting.

## **8. Credentialing**

Most interviewees said that a performer or instructor with official credentials from YANJEP would not necessarily be more attractive than one without, all else being equal; however, one interviewee said yes, that credentials would make a performer more attractive. A few said that vetting is indeed a concern, but the YANJEP label is enough of a credential. "I don't need a credentialing system from YA because that's what they do." Another assembly coordinator remarked, "Once we were booking a person on our own, and I was a little concerned about vetting. With YA we were able to preview at the showcase. They were vetted already;

there were website reviews. The staff is great at giving information about the performers. This is a concern, especially with Catholic schools in our area.”

Recommendations:

- It seems like “credentialing” is valued, but clients already see YANJEP’s endorsement of a performer or instructor as being a badge of approval. No more needs to be done rather than to emphasize in communications that so-an-so is “a YA performer,” and, as usual, ensure that performers and instructors maintain the highest professional and artistic standards.

**9. Fundraisers**

Most interviewees believed that their schools already had enough fundraisers and that their fundraising schedules wouldn’t accommodate another one like Run for the Arts. Other fundraisers that raise money for assemblies and enrichment programs include merchandise sales, book fairs, box tops, events, movie night, candy sales, bingo, and fashion shows. “People are giving so much time and money,” said one interviewee, “so I’m not sure that would work for our school. Our budget is what it is. \$10,000.”

There was initial interest from one Catholic school representative who, after thinking about it, said, “It would be myself and co-worker running it. An event that size is an enormous undertaking. The school, liability wise, wouldn’t want to be a part of it. It would have to happen outside the school.”

One representative from an elementary school in Southern NJ was very enthusiastic because their school has a running club that meets after school. She said that Run for the Arts could be the annual culminating event for the club, and the kids could earn a charm or badge. However, when asked if other elementary schools have running clubs, she answered, “This is a special case—other schools don’t have this.”

Recommendations:

- Since Run for the Arts has already been piloted and presumably packaged, contact the one school that expressed interest. This would be the best way to pilot the program in the NJ/PA area.
- As funding and shrinking budgets are issues for all schools, if additional fundraisers are out of the question, then do a little handholding. Communicate to clients all the resources already in place that will help them pay for YA programs, such as ESSA funds; other state, federal, or local funds; the YA

scholarship; and the referral program. Have a list of schools that have successfully utilized these funding sources, and give them the first steps to take advantage of these programs.

## CONCLUSION

This study suggests an environment where genuine and passionate people—teachers, staff, parents—are strapped for time and money, but want to make sure their kids are happy and enlightened through programs outside the daily routine. The ultimate test of these programs are smiles, not quizzes or stats.

Recommendations have been listed throughout this report, but the general recommendations for YANJEP are as follows:

- Whereas the main target audience is assembly coordinators (and they may be staff, teachers, or volunteers), there are many people who influence the decision to book assemblies and residencies, namely administrators, teachers, PTO officers, and parents.
- Timing of purchase decisions varies, but most assembly coordinators have a long process involving input from several sources. Therefore, timing is less important than making sure the right people have the right materials and YA staff are always available to help.
- The main competition is direct booking with performers. YANJEP should therefore emphasize the benefits they have that performers do not, as listed in the end of Section 1 in the Interview Section.
- Important media are live events, showcases, videos, and the catalog. Word of mouth is key.
- YANJEP should focus its messaging on the strengths of its brand:
  - Quality
  - Service
  - Reliability
  - Diversity... and throughout all communications, make sure the FUN shines through.