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Local Org Makes Arts and Culture More Accessible to Youths

Nonprofit TeenTix is just the ticket for engaging teens in the arts

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Gavin Bradler’s interest in theater began early. By the time he reached high school, he was already coveting tickets to sellout shows like Seattle Rep’s “In the Heights.” Thanks to his membership in [TeenTix](https://www.teentix.org/) (<https://www.teentix.org/>), he scored a \$5 standing-room ticket to the show’s closing performance.

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“I went on my own; it felt so adult, and I felt so responsible and rewarded. It was great,” says Bradler, who is now 19 and working as the communications specialist at TeenTix.

TeenTix is a nonprofit that works to make arts and culture more accessible to youths ages 13–19. For only \$5, its flagship program furnishes members with tickets to arts events all over the Puget Sound region. The organization also helps young people get more deeply involved in the arts community through leadership and communications opportunities. Participation in all TeenTix programs is free, and the organization works with individuals to overcome any barriers to accessibility.

Formed in 2004, TeenTix was originally a project designed by the city of Seattle to introduce teens to the handful of arts organizations based at Seattle Center. But the project was so successful that soon other Seattle venues wanted to take part. Now, TeenTix is an independent nonprofit with more than 70 partners across King, Pierce and Snohomish counties. The organization recently launched a sister program in Los Angeles that provides reciprocal benefits for members in both cities. TeenTix issues more than 7,000 new passes each year; local teens have used them to attend more than 130,000 plays, concerts, museum programs and more.

“People can begin to engage with the arts at any time,” says Monique Courcy, executive director of TeenTix. “But the reason we focus on teenagers specifically is that we saw that art opportunities were missing for teens. We want to empower teens at that age where they are practicing autonomy to develop positive interactions with art experiences, such as buying a ticket, figuring out transportation and watching a show — and doing so in a way that places ownership in the hands of the teen.”

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That ethos is what drew Bradler into the organization. “I wholeheartedly believe that art should be accessible to as many people as possible,” he says. But Bradler points to cost, transportation, and even knowledge — of both what’s available and how to access it — as barriers to young people just beginning to explore the arts. “My job in communications has been sharing that knowledge. I want to make sure people can experience the arts that we all need. Especially now, my generation is facing so many challenges. There’s no better time for artists to speak up and for young people to have those experiences and learn from them.”

TeenTix pass program

Joining TeenTix is easy and free. Anyone ages 13–19 can visit the TeenTix website and fill out the [membership form \(https://www.teentix.org/sign-up\)](https://www.teentix.org/sign-up) – no documentation or parental signature is required. A digital pass is issued immediately, but teens can also request a physical pass, which fits on a keychain. Bradler recommends signing up for the newsletter at the same time to start receiving a weekly email announcing interesting arts opportunities. Members can also find events on the TeenTix website using the calendar, the list of partners or a map to help teens find events in their own neighborhoods.

For first-timers, it can be scary to walk up to the box office and buy a ticket.

“Using that pass can be intimidating. But the TeenTix pass is your welcome letter. It is an invitation, not just a thing that our partners reluctantly sign on to. Our partners really want to see you there,” says Bradler. “The pass program is about having the freedom to explore. It’s cool, because I can pick what I want to see, rather than having to see what I can afford.”

To use the pass, the pass holder shows it (along with a school ID or other photo ID) at the box office on the day of the event and pays \$5 for their ticket. It’s a good idea to call the box office on the day you want to attend, just to make sure that tickets haven’t sold out. On certain days, pass holders can bring a guest and buy two tickets for \$10. (Once, my daughter took me to the opera on a two-for-\$10 day and was extremely proud of getting better seats than I usually buy.)

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Deeper engagement

“We think it’s successful if a teen uses their TeenTix pass even one time,” says Courcy. But for many teens, that introduction to arts engagement is only the beginning. Since that first play five years ago, Bradler became involved with the arts org, first as an intern and now an employee – and he still uses his pass.

“Just last week I went to MoPOP with my friend, who signed up that day, to see the opening of the Ruth E. Carter costume design exhibit,” he says.

The New Guard

For teens who want to be more deeply involved in the arts community, TeenTix provides youth development programs. The New Guard program trains teens to become leaders in the arts community.

“It kind of pulls back the curtain on what jobs are there beyond being on a stage or practicing an art form,” Courcy explains. The New Guard participants learn communications, marketing and fundraising skills. Members attend regular arts outings, work with TeenTix Arts Partners to inform and develop their teen-centric programming and communication, and act as ambassadors for the program in their community. They also plan the annual Teeny Awards program. Attending his first Teeny Awards night is one of Bradler’s favorite TeenTix memories. “We got to celebrate the things we saw in the last year and meet a bunch of

people. I learned about different art forms that I didn't know existed before that. The energy in that room was fun and youthful and supportive and loving," he says.

In addition to hiring a handful of interns each year (and spreading the word about other arts-related internships), TeenTix collaborates with [The Colorization Collective](https://www.colorizationcollective.org/) (<https://www.colorizationcollective.org/>) to promote diversity in the arts through a one-on-one professional mentorship program for teen artists of color.

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Press Corps

The TeenTix Press Corps produces arts reviews and profiles on the TeenTix blog and for other publications. It is currently developing a monthly podcast that will feature recommendations of local arts events. The organization hosts workshops at schools and partner organizations throughout the year. During these workshops, participants learn from professional arts journalists and receive one-on-one feedback on their work.

"The Press Corps really focuses on teaching youth how to value their own voice [and understand] that, regardless of their level of experience with a particular art form, their opinion is valid," says Courcy. Applications for the 2022–2023 Press Corps are currently open, with an Aug. 12 deadline.

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