

## **Arts Organizations and Accountability**

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This paper presents the findings from a survey of accountability practices of 147 nonprofit arts organizations. The purpose of the survey was to explore how arts organizations pursue accountability to funders and beneficiaries and what factors contribute to accountability. In this study, accountability was defined as answerability for results and explored along three dimensions: *financial, organizational, and mission* (Reiser, 2010).

The descriptive findings suggest that arts organizations actively pursue accountability along all three dimensions: financial, organizational, and mission, and that in arts organizations concerns about customers, audiences, and creative mission take precedence over considerations of efficiency. At the same time, the survey shows that compliance burden associated with gathering data for external reporting remains high, use of industry standards and comparative data in decision-making remains low, and organizations continue to be least satisfied with board performance in the areas of fundraising and advocacy. Insufficient resources, including limited staff and outdated technology, conflicting expectations of stakeholders, and lack of clarity about the meaning and measures of accountability appear to hinder accountability efforts.

The regression results suggest that associational membership, director's experience, organization's age and size relate to accountability, but the relationship is not straightforward. Better financial controls in older, more established organizations may come at the expense of higher compliance burden. Larger organizations may have less engaged stakeholders and board members. Organizational and institutional factors may have conflicting influences on various aspects of accountability. Further examination of the interaction between organizational and institutional factors is needed in order to understand how accountability can be improved.