

Student performers need to learn about the fields of community outreach and engagement as part of their training. In addition to performing concerts only with other students and parents, they can work and perform in the schools and neighborhoods as a way to connect more with people. *“In building music, consumers are not necessarily the performers. Performance is an offering, not an exhibition. Whether the audience leaves feeling whole again is whether the performers did their job.”* Quoted by, Dr. Nancy Allred, Professor of Music, Dixie State University.

With this push to engage with the community, many musicians find that they are learning necessary skills too late in their career, and they would have benefitted from participation in community programs during their time in school. In order to adequately train musicians to function in the roles of community outreach and engagement, music teachers must understand the different types of community programs. There is a difference between programs deemed community outreach and those that are community engagement.

Outreach programs are most often performed outside of the recital halls. They are most often performed for an audience that might be unfamiliar with the training and activities in a music studio. Music students reach out and share their talents with these new audiences. Engagement programs often contain the same element of reaching out to new communities. However, in an engagement program, the performer takes great care to design a program with the audience in mind that includes more opportunities for audience to interact with elements of the program. Engagement encourages reciprocal learning and communication between the audience and performances.

Music teachers can provide real world performance opportunities for their students. As teacher and student create community programs together and work towards a common purpose, they will experience a heightened sense of community within the studio. Participation in community performance breathes “life and vitality” to the teacher and the student who serve in the much needed public engagement. The experiences can also benefit future career of their students.

Teachers as leaders in the field of music can serve as a positive example of a community-engaged musician. Community performances allow music students to connect what they learn to the needs and interests of the community. Not only do students celebrate their accomplishments with members of the community, but they emerge with a new or renewed sense of commitment to continue civic engagement.

There are many benefits to community outreach programs including multiple performances of recital material, experience in scheduling performances at public venues, experience finding or arranging repertoire, and performance experience in venue outside of traditional recital halls. Preparation for an outreach performance is typically synonymous with preparation for a recital hall performance, and the program format resembles a traditional concert. However, outreach performances require additional elements of scheduling with a community partner.

An engagement program bridges the skills of the music performers with the needs or knowledge of the community. Engagement programs require consultation with the community prior to the planned program, in order for the musician(s) to take special considerations for the interests,

needs, and prior knowledge of the community audience. Depending on the design and purpose of a program, it might feature several engagement elements to include: *personal stories relevant to the program, *visual aids or artwork that relate to the music, *musical connection to a broader context or theme, *guided audience participation in part of the music making, *entry points that allow for a deeper experience with the music, *audience interests guiding the music selection process.

Community performers use their knowledge and expertise to create musical situations that may be part of cultural and arts events, linked with celebration, ceremonies, rituals, play, education, social uplift, or life passages. For any community performance program, adding effective elements of audience engagement heightens the experience for both the performer and listener.

Most community sites will not have a stage for the performers. Performances often take place in venues most comfortable for the audience. Expecting recital hall acoustics and lighting is unrealistic at most community venues. If the teacher is concerned about the performance space, a planned visit with the community contact to make sure the space will work for everyone involved might be necessary.

Ideas for Outreach and Engagement Performances: Nursing Homes, Retirement Communities, Art Galleries, Museums, Outdoor Venues and Festivals, Hotels, Restaurants, Book Stores, Country Clubs, Markets, Soup Kitchens, Retailers, Parties or Event Receptions, Shelters, Community Centers, and Libraries, Churches, Schools grades K-5 and also 6-12, after school programs, and orphanages.

While each venue and potential audience offers a different experience, consider. For example an event at a retirement community will have an audience already built-in, so there is no need to attract audience members. The planning time can focus on the performance itself and not a promotion for the event.

For more information visit: [Creating and Implementing Community-Based Performance Programs: A Guide for the Applied Studio Teacher](#) by Lauren Watkins, in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of doctor of Musical Arts in Performance.

<https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4520&context=etd>