



# ILLUMINATING THE ‘HUMAN’ IN ‘HUMANITIES’

A Rebranding Story



October 2022  
KNow Research

## Case Study Background

Each year we have the pleasure of helping one pro bono client who we feel is doing important work in our society that we want to help support. 2022's recipient was the [Chicago Humanities Festival](#) (CHF). The was Festival launched in 1989 by a group of Chicago's cultural leaders eager to extend the rich ideas of the humanities to wider public audiences. The organization's top priority this year was to invest in a re-positioned, forward-looking brand to achieve growth goals.

# What's Informing this Process

- Audience Research Fall 2021:** Quantitative Data and Analysis from strategic planning process defined the target audience and helped define the category/competitive set  
*Chicago Cultural Consumer Audience Study, McKinsey & Company Research Partners*  
Total Participants: 811
- Audience Research Summer 2022:** Qualitative Research and Analysis helped surface the winning brand promise and reasons to believe that resonate most strongly with the target audiences  
*Chicago Humanities Festival Qualitative Study & Analysis, KNow Research Partners*  
Total Participants: 50

## Setting the Stage with Quantitative

To gather insights about the current and potential supporters' perspectives, CHF conducted a survey of N=811 cultural event attendees to gauge attendance and donation motivations and preferences, as well as a brand awareness scan of Chicago's leading arts and culture institutions.

## Survey results revealed strong motivations to participate in humanities and cultural events, but low CHF brand awareness

1. Motivations to engage with humanities involved getting engaged. Audiences wanted to explore new ideas, connect with like-minded attendees, and learn from leaders in their fields
2. While current CHF members deeply appreciated its unique position in the community, overall brand awareness was very low
3. A more defined brand image, greater awareness, and increased visibility could convert one-time attendees to become more committed supporters through membership.

These initial findings fed directly into CHF's strategic plan, which prioritized investing in brand repositioning to achieve its growth goals. This hinged upon attracting younger, diverse, relatively high-income Chicagoans with a passion for learning and cultural exploration. CHF then needed to know which promises, and benefits (and ultimately messages) to prioritize both for current supporters and future audiences.

**Pro Tip:** Start with surveying the terrain broadly with a quantitative survey to understand and prioritize your target audience(s). We also recommend [social media listening](#) at this stage to understand the natural conversations that are happening around your topic/brand.

## Qualitative Objectives

Using iterative, hybrid qualitative methods, KNow helped CHF expand upon its quantitative findings to explore how statements resonated with CHF's current and prospective supporters.

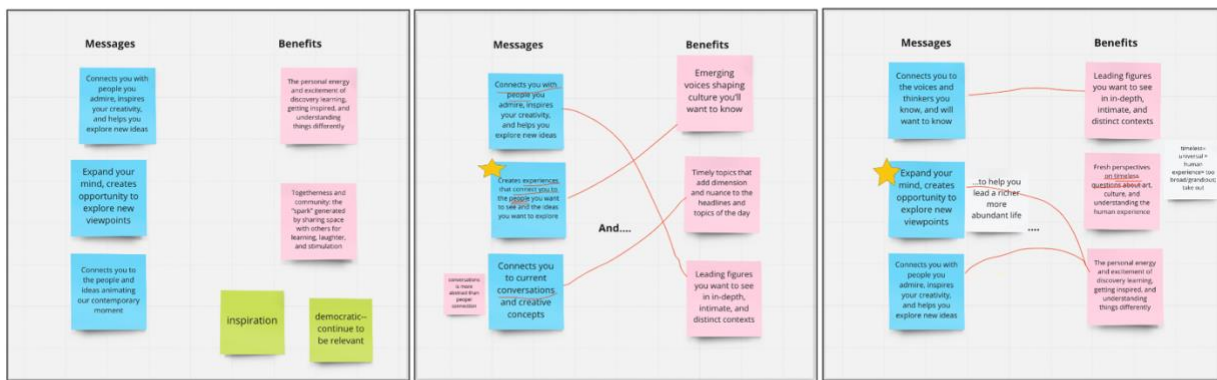
1. **Current audiences** – who they are and what engages them with CHF?
2. **Prospective audiences** – how to get their attention and encourage their participation?
3. **Branding and messaging** – guide CHF on materials to support their retention and growth goals

## Phase 1: Current Audiences

Start with current audiences to understand your current brand associations, wins, and opportunities. CHF needed to ensure that new/refined branding wouldn't alienate their core audiences. We interviewed a selection of supporters and donors to understand what they appreciated about past events and what types of programming and communication they would like to see in the future. We tested a series of Promise and Benefit statements, refining them as we went until we got to a place where we had a solid set of statements that current audiences found believable, appealing, and aspirational for the organization

**Pro Tip:** Use a [collaborative whiteboard tool](#) (e.g., Miro, Mural) to mark up, rate, rank, prioritize and iterate messages shown. Use a tool like this both with your participants and with your stakeholder team to keep the iterations flowing (and organized!)

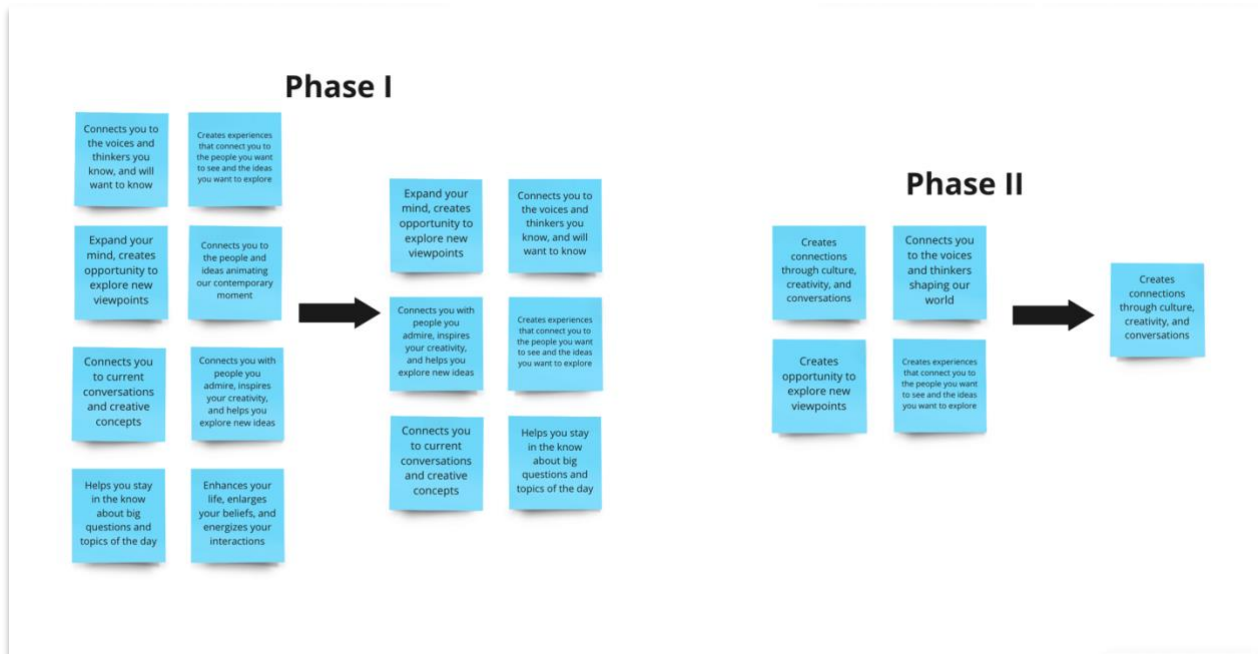
## Selected Packages – Phase 1



Interview 7-Current Audience

Interview 8-Donor

Interview 9-Donor



This phase revealed that current supporters come to CHF for big ideas and new voices, and to identify themselves as patrons of the arts. They love the intellectual rigor and mind-expanding content offered by CHF and responded well to language about leading thinkers, big ideas, and a space to connect with new perspectives. Donors were not driven by a desire to be acknowledged in their giving, but also were missing a sense of where their support was going and to what end.

## Phase 2: Prospective Audiences

**Build on prospective audience viewpoints to help you expand to meet their needs.**

Prospective audiences helped us iterate and refine the messages further.

**Pro Tip:** Build on and validate what you've already learned! In our case, the qualitative audiences validated what we had heard in the survey: they wanted interactive experiences, not passive listening events.

## Qualitative feedback supported the quantitative research and allowed the team to land on a compelling and unique brand promise

4. Audiences want connection to new ideas and perspectives, in-depth, dynamic experiences exploring topics beyond the headlines and connection to others who are open-minded, intelligent, and curious
5. This younger, more diverse group also had the capital to donate, but prefer to do so in a more event-specific way (vs. the traditional annual supporter model)

**Pro Tip:** [Daily debriefs](#) keep teams nimble! Develop a collaborative partnership to allow your research team to iterate and pivot quickly, and for your stakeholder team to evangelize the learnings along the way to their teams!

### Next Steps:

KNow helped CHF build bridges of shared messaging between current and prospective audiences. Both groups share core values around humanities programming that CHF's marketing committee will bring into future campaigns and programming, revolving around culture through connection and experience



And they're not waiting for the Spring 2023 Festival's new identify launch to use what they've learned! The CHF team is integrating learnings into their Fall 2022 Festival as we speak to

maximize their potential of reaching new audiences and introducing them to the new experiential programming this fall.

**Locals Tip:** Will you be in Chicago this fall? Check out the programming line-up at the [Chicago Humanities Festival](#). **Warning:** You might just run into a KNow Booth Insights pop-up in full swing while you're there!

*It's never too late to be thinking about 2023. Please nominate your favorite non-profit organization for KNow's 2023 Pro Bono Beneficiary: [admin@knowresearch.com](mailto:admin@knowresearch.com)*