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The 15th Theatre: A Kentucky State Theatre Proposal

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20 April 2024

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Abstract

The 15th Theatre project proposes a strategic and programmatic plan for a Kentucky state theatre, driven by the mission to uphold Kentucky voices within a professional theatre. This proposed theatre company strives to become a quintessential meeting place for all Kentuckians to explore their history, create new Kentucky-based work, and represent the authentic experience of the diverse regions of the state, from the large population centers of Louisville to the mountainous Appalachia. Reflecting on the current struggles facing regional and professional theatre companies across the country in the post-pandemic entertainment economy, the strategic planning of this theatre outlines the necessity of institutional visibility, audience engagement, and the adaptability of the theatrical model. This project coalesces research into the institutions of regional theatre, arts administration models, and Kentucky's theatre and arts tradition into an applied project that proposes a new, culturally relevant, Kentucky-based theatre company.

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The 15th Theatre: A Kentucky State Theatre Proposal

Introduction

Given the current state of American arts funding and the general public's relationship with fine and performing arts, the theatre industry may seem to be heading towards extinction, if not already obsolete. After all, with the "death of the recording industry, the near-death of subscriptions, the renewed focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) and resulting swoon in the liberal arts... the erosion of newspaper readership and its threat to serious arts criticism, the aging of the donor base, the raiding of endowments," the viability of regional and small theatre companies seems unlikely.¹ Especially after the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting dramatic shift in focus towards streamable entertainment, theatre in the United States may seem even more in danger of becoming an obsolete industry. Further challenges, including the decline in arts education and training, the stagnation of regional arts programming, and the polarization of political discourse leading to heightened censorship, threaten the future of the existence of a theatre culture. This bleak outlook on American theatre necessitates a reevaluation of how theatre and the performing arts are run and how companies and communities define the success of a theatre company, both artistically and financially.

The issues facing the American theatre industry as a whole are exemplified in Kentucky's arts culture. The economic and political realities of Kentucky leave the state largely split between two metropolitan areas, Louisville and Lexington, and the less populated, more rural areas of Kentucky, including Appalachia and other historically underfunded, underdeveloped areas. This dichotomy in the state's structure affects how the people of the state interact with the

¹ Kaiser, M. (2015). *Curtains?: The future of the arts in America*. Brandeis university.

arts. Within Louisville, Kentucky's largest metropolitan area with a population over 1.3 million, constituents are inundated with a range of arts and cultural organizations, including over 25 different performing arts groups.² However, these companies compete for support and attendance amongst each other and with alternative forms of leisure, recreation, and education. The theatre culture in Kentucky features a wide variety of companies, ranging from community theatres, small local companies, a regional theatre, a growing Shakespeare company, and the Kentucky Performing Arts, a center that hosts national tours and local companies. The smaller companies do not tend to have their own venues, instead renting spaces from different venues, including the Kentucky Center for Performing Arts, a performance space owned by Kentucky Performing Arts.

Outside of the metropolitan areas of Louisville and Lexington, arts programming, including professional theatre and arts education, is less accessible, with the notable exception of the work done by Appalshop, an arts organization committed to preserving and continuing Appalachia's history. Facing negative stereotypes and economic struggles, Eastern Kentucky and rural Kentucky has a rich creative history, including quilt making and bluegrass music, that greatly impacts the aggregate culture of the state. Taken as a whole, Kentucky's arts culture is diverse, with organizations differing widely in size, mission, and strategies, but all face the nationwide challenges of declining attendance, declining funding, and the cultural shifts following the coronavirus pandemic.

The current artistic and cultural realities of Kentucky call for the existence of a new arts organization, one that may connect the varied experiences of those living in Kentucky, be it in a

² Nonprofit Metrics LLC. (2024). *Louisville performing arts organizations*. Cause IQ. <https://www.causeiq.com/directory/performing-arts-organizations-list/louisvillejefferson-county-ky-in-metro/>

rural or urban landscape. The following project will outline a proposal for a Kentucky state theatre that celebrates the voices of Kentucky, reflecting its rich diversity and culture. Within this project, I look to build an organization that systematically uplifts Kentucky playwrights and storytellers, provides employment for Kentucky-based performing artists, and builds a sustainable business model. Artistically, this theatre would explore what it means to be a Kentuckian, delving into stories of immigrants and refugees, racial minorities, and rural Kentuckians. Utilizing research from regional theatres across the United States, firsthand accounts from arts administrators, and arts administration texts, this proposal considers contemporary theatre industry issues in the development of a strategic, programmatic, development, and educational plans of this company.

This project is the culmination of several different avenues of inspiration, including my connection to theatre in Louisville and undergraduate coursework. Growing up in Louisville, I have long felt a connection to the local theatre community, attending productions with family and friends at many of the theatre companies near me. My individual experiences, varying from community theatre to the touring Broadway shows through the Kentucky Center for Performing Arts, greatly influenced my drive to pursue a career in the arts. Upon entering college, I chose to pursue both a theatre and business degree, combining my passion for the arts with my interest in administration and organizational skills. As I pursued theatrical training throughout my undergraduate experience, I became more aware of a passion for arts administration, combining creative skills learned in theatre classes with the practical skills from business principles. Through arts administration classes, I learned more about the issues facing theatres and arts organizations across the country and that I wanted to be a part of addressing how theatre and theatre administration will evolve in the future.

The inspiration for this project was also largely inspired by my time studying abroad in London from January to June 2023, experiencing the city's arts and performing culture. Throughout my time in London, I became enamored with the National Theatre, a large-scale theatre company that seeks to serve the entire nation by creating new works and adaptations and working with theatres and schools across the UK.³ I realized that this model works well for a smaller area like the UK, but it would not work well for the United States due to its massive size and population. However, state theatres could be created to serve their smaller regions, allowing unique identities and relevant new stories to be developed. I thought about the stories that I had seen in theatres in Louisville and realized that most of the programming that I had seen was not written by people from Kentucky or about Kentucky-specific stories. This realization was the main inspiration to research theatres across Kentucky to create a theatre whose foundation would be the celebration and exploration of Kentucky- its history, its voices, and its unique identity.

³ *About us: National theatre*. National Theatre. (2024). <https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/about-us/>

Review of the Literature

Research for this proposal was gathered from various sources, including the strategic plans of over seventy-five resident and regional theatres across the United States, various contemporary news articles, discussions with local and national arts administrators, and the arts administration texts of Michael Kaiser. The theatres researched are affiliated either with the League of Resident Theatres or are based in Kentucky. The information derived from this research along with Kaiser's practical guides into arts administration display several contemporary arts issues that must be addressed in the building of a new theatre company, including the stagnation of arts programming, funding concerns, and planning deficits.

League of Resident Theatres

The League of Resident Theatres, a professional theatre association largely existing as a collective bargaining and networking entity, lists seventy-eight resident theatres throughout the United States.⁴ The data collected from these institutions included the theatres' mission, vision, and values statements, mainstage programming, educational programming, and noteworthy initiatives.⁵ Following this research, several trends of the industry became apparent. For example, as with many organizations following the social justice movements of 2020, I noted that many of these theatres' strategic plans include an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion statement and many include a Land Acknowledgement statement, displaying the dedication to social equity within the national arts atmosphere. Several theatres posted statements from their artistic leadership about suspended seasons, programs, or closures based on financial struggle following

⁴ *Who We Are*. League of Resident Theatres. (2024). <https://lort.org/theatres>

⁵ Access to the summarization sheet of LORT and Kentucky Theatre Strategic and Programmatic Research: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/105Wnggmyno-C3TXRGFvVfOUbXK4aedqQ2rGQonhE1t0/edit?usp=sharing>

the pandemic. Further, many resident theatres seemingly have stagnated and homogenized, losing a distinct identity. These issues are exemplified in the theatres' mission and programming.

Mission and vision statements set the tone of an organization, succinctly describing its institutional identity and its artistic goals. Troublingly, many regional and resident theatres lack a connection to their specific state or region, with over forty-six percent leaving the name of their location or regional name out of their mission. There are notable exceptions to this trend, with several theatres creating a strong connection with their region, including the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, Georgia, which proudly declares itself “Atlanta’s national theatre.” Alliance utilizes its location to garner large corporations’ support, including Disney and Coca-Cola, companies with strong business links to the city, intrinsically tying themselves into the cultural and capitalist reality of Atlanta.⁶ Further, the Alley Theatre in Houston, Texas lists a vision to be “essential to Houston, the nation, and the world” and implemented El Zocalo, a “place-making initiative to celebrate, grow, and interact with Houston’s diverse Latin culture and artistic community,” creating community connections specific to Houston’s populace.⁷ These examples show how theatres can dedicate and connect to the region in which they operate, but an alarming percentage of LORT member theatres lack these specific regional and community connections.

Outside of the issue of creating a distinct regional connection within the mission or vision of the organization, many theatres propose a mission that is so vague that it lacks any specific identity at all. Over thirty percent of theatres connected with LORT list some variation on the mission to “inspire” audiences through “diverse programming.” While the lack of specificity of these missions allows the theatres a kind of freedom in the type of programming and initiatives

⁶ Alliance Theatre. (2024). <https://www.alliancetheatre.org/>

⁷ *El Zócalo*. Alley Theatre. (2024). <https://www.alleytheatre.org/community/el-zocalo/>

they take, it creates an aggregate theatre industry of homogenous organizations, many using the same buzz words and often leads to many producing similar programming.

The issue of vague missions and indistinct institutional identity bleeds into the types of programming offered by regional theatres; as theatres' missions become more similar and vague, the programming offered becomes more similar, with many theatres offering the same mainstage titles. Many regional theatres offer seasonal productions or family favorites, including titles like *A Christmas Carol*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, or *Dial M for Murder*. In fact, over thirty-eight percent of LORT theatres produced *A Christmas Carol* this past theatre season. Many resident theatres also strive to follow the commercial programming of Broadway, producing recent Tony-winning titles or bringing in touring productions, including shows like *The Lehman Trilogy*, *A Strange Loop*, and *What the Constitution Means to Me*. Further, theatres feel a social call to produce diverse titles, written by people of color, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and women. However, the “diverse” titles tend to come from the same small group of playwrights, limiting the actual diversity of programming. For instance, many theatres with a mission or vision-driven goal to promote diversity offered a Lynn Nottage play, *Fat Ham*, and/or *Quixote Nuevo* in the previous 2023 theatre season. The institutional choices to choose seasonal or classic favorites, follow the commercial Broadway model, or take from a small pool of popular “diverse” titles furthers the stagnation and homogenization of the programming of regional theatres in the U.S. These programming decisions, while they may prove profitable or popular in the short run, create barriers to entry for playwrights writing new work and homogenizes the types of stories, lessening the specific cultural identity of the theatres producing these stories.

Nonprofit regional theatres are called to not only produce arts programming, but also to provide educational programming to the surrounding community.⁸ The level of commitment and structure to these educational programs varies widely across the nation. Every LORT theatre offers an opportunity for student matinees, and the majority of the theatres offer a summer camp for young people. Several theatres, based on their proximity to communities that are historically underfunded, create programs specific to their community, including the American Conservatory Theatre connection to schools in the San Francisco Bay area.⁹ Further educational programs offered in various resident theatres include young playwrights festivals, monologue competitions, artists in residency, school and library tours, and educational workshops. The educational programming of a theatre organization offers the ability to create deep community connections and instill an appreciation of the arts in young people, allowing theatres another avenue to fulfill their mission. These educational opportunities also serve to grow the family of the theatre in the community's young people who will either grow up to be patrons or donors or who will convince their families to support the theatre.

While looking at the troubling vagueness of institutional identity present in many regional theatres, several theatres have created unique identities and initiatives specific to their region or organization or have found innovative ways to reach their community's needs. For instance, Ford Theatre in Washington D.C. offers several unique educational programs based on its history as the site of the Lincoln assassination, inviting school groups to tour the space, learn about the history of Lincoln, slavery, and the Civil War, as well as offering several teacher's

⁸ Kaiser, M. M., & Egan, B. E. (2013). *The cycle: a practical approach to managing arts organizations*. Brandeis University Press.

⁹ *Community partnerships*. American Conservatory Theater. (2024). <https://www.act-sf.org/community/community-partnerships/>

continuing education programs.¹⁰ Further, the Everyman Theatre in Maryland offers childcare during their matinees, lowering the barriers to entry for parents and guardians who would otherwise either have to organize childcare themselves or choose to not attend.¹¹ Initiatives like these, using the specificity of identity to build programming or finding innovative solutions to entice community members, show that theatre companies are able to adapt to their regions and to economic realities.

The research of LORT theatres offers an overview of the current realities of regional theatres across the United States. Professional theatres' attempts to come back from the pandemic have struggled, as many populations have not returned to the theatre. The old trends of vague institutional and regional identity and the stagnated program of relying on family favorites or Broadway titles no longer provide a stable model. The American regional theatre must reevaluate the goals of their institution and their methods of reaching their communities. The strategies and programmatic planning of this project will seek to differentiate itself from these issues by creating a specific identity and programming that reflects the institution.

Arts Administration Texts

As I set out in this project to develop a strategic plan for an arts organization, it was vital to understand this process and the context surrounding arts organizations in general. The following texts offer firsthand accounts from arts administrators, articles that have cited arts administrators, and texts written by established arts administrators which proved invaluable in my process of developing the plan behind the 15th Theatre.

¹⁰ *Education programs*. Ford's Theatre. (2024). <https://fords.org/teaching-and-learning/education-programs/>

¹¹ *Childcare matinees*. Everyman Theatre. (2023, December 14). <https://everymantheatre.org/event/childcare-matinees/>

Curtains? The Future of the Arts in America, Michael Kaiser

This source establishes that U.S. arts organizations are currently facing a difficult environment due to the wide use of the Internet for entertainment, the near death of arts subscriptions, the aging of the donor base, and the decline in newspaper sales and therefore professional arts criticism and journalistic coverage. Because of these factors, it is important to plan strategically, to consistently and vigorously create strong art and institutional marketing, and to create a diverse family of supporters to survive as an arts organization. The arts industry is evolving due to technological improvements (and therefore certain technology obsolescence) and new distribution methods (i.e., online options like streaming services). While people will always need artistic outlets, the wide range of substitutes and the changing socioeconomic wage gap will lead to a decrease in live, in-person productions. Therefore, arts organizations will have to be aware of their place in the 21st century and how to evolve with the changes in technology and social factors.

The Cycle: A Practical Approach to Managing Arts Organizations, Michael Kaiser

Kaiser outlines the cyclical process of developing and running an arts organization. By creating strong programming (theatrical productions, museum events, etc.) and marketing the arts organization as a whole as well as specific programs, a company builds its family of supporters who provide financial support, thus creating the opportunity to create more strong programming. Making great art that people can connect to and care about is central to building a strong arts organization. Marketing an organization's exemplary art is split into two categories: institutional (marketing the organization as a whole) and programmatic (marketing a specific program, for instance a specific play). The members that interact with the art and its marketing

make up the family- including donors, board members, volunteers, and audience members. An arts organization depends on its family financially through earned income (ticket sales), contributed income (donations), and endowment revenue.

Strategic Planning in the Arts: A Practical Guide, Michael Kaiser

In *Strategic Planning*, Kaiser states that while arts organizations tend to be nonprofit companies, they should still implement a strategic plan, similar to for-profit organizations.¹² This text goes through the process of building a strategic plan and listing out certain issues to consider during the planning stage of an arts organization. Mission-driven strategic planning clarifies every level of the company's goals. Strategic planning in an arts organization may seem like a process that takes the creativity out of the arts, but Kaiser states that the artistic decisions should continue to be made by artistic directors. However, the decisions of the artistic director create business implications for the business that should be considered in the strategic plan. It is important to strike a balance between the arts and business aspects of an arts organization to avoid planning backlash, financial struggle, and low morale.

A Crisis in American Theatres Leaves Prestigious Stages Dark, Michael Paulson

Michael Paulson gathered data from around the country to compile an overview of the theatre industry.¹³ This article provides a contemporary look at the regional theatres across the United States within the context of the years following the pandemic recovery. Many theatres are currently struggling to keep their doors open or to produce complete seasons due to monetary concerns. While this is currently a bleak existence, regional theatres are finding new ways to

¹² Kaiser, M. M. (2018). *Strategic planning in the arts: A practical guide*. Mass.

¹³ Paulson, M. (2023, July 23). *A crisis in America's theaters leaves prestigious stages dark*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/23/theater/regional-theater-crisis.html#:~:text=As%20they%20struggle%20to%20recover,%2C%20in%20some%20cases%2C%20closing.&text=There%20is%20less%20theater%20in,Fewer%20venues>

operate. For instance, several theatres have started partnerships, allowing them to share space and physical resources, including warehouses, costumes, and props, to cut down on costs.

The 15th Theatre

The following original documents were created as part of the strategic planning process I engaged in for my imagined company, The 15th Theatre. Included are mission, vision, and values statements, a comprehensive strategic and programmatic plan, an overview for potential development and educational actions, and the internal structure of creative and administrative roles. This collection of documents presents a vision for a Kentucky State theatre that actively addresses the issues outlined in the preceding research faced by current regional theatres and follows administrative best practices while generating new, state-specific goals.

The 15th Theatre: Strategic Plan

Mission

The 15th Theatre serves and celebrates Kentucky - all of Kentucky - through authentic theatrical storytelling from the voices of the state.

Vision

The 15th Theatre strives to become the quintessential meeting place for all Kentuckians to explore their history, uphold Kentucky voices, and represent the authentic experience of the diverse regions of the state.

Values

- Storytelling: Kentucky has a rich cultural past of storytelling through music and art. We reflect this heritage and strive to tell stories that reflect the lived experience of all Kentuckians.

- Authenticity: Telling Kentucky stories should belong to the people of Kentucky, dispelling stereotypes and imbuing truth to the stories of the state.
- Education: Stories teach us empathy and inspire curiosity. Through creating theatre for the community and developing strong education-based programs, we will provide an educational resource for schools and work to inspire life-long empathy and curiosity.
- Sustainability: Kentucky is a beautiful state filled with incredible natural beauty. We strive to create a theatre that efficiently uses resources to maintain Kentucky's ecosystem. Through using found spaces to utilizing the practices of the Theatre Greenbook, we will create sustainable theatre.
- Collaboration: We learn more and can impact more communities by working together.

We strive to create an environment that reflects the diversity of Kentucky.

The following strategies will work to achieve the mission of the 15th Theatre. These strategies include implementation items that range in complexity and length of time to responsibly develop and build to peak performance.

Strategy #1: Create an intrinsic connection with Kentucky life.

1. Commit to every program being connected to an aspect of Kentucky life in one or more of the following ways:
 - a. Program written by a Kentucky-based playwright.
 - b. Program is set in Kentucky.
 - c. Program involves partnership with a Kentucky-based company.
 - d. Kentucky Home Series: Program features a landmark, attraction, or occurrence specific to Kentucky.
2. Create quality new work that celebrates challenges, and authentically displays Kentucky life.
 - a. Example: Verbatim plays using the diverse perspectives present in the state
3. Develop a strong program of commissioning and supporting Kentucky-based playwrights.
 - a. This program will work to keep Kentucky-based playwrights employed in the state and help guarantee that the voices making plays about Kentucky are authentic.

4. Create relationships with Kentucky-based organizations for partnerships and funding opportunities.
 - a. Develop relationships with Tourism, Arts, and Heritage Cabinet, Kentucky Arts Council, and different agencies that support arts and tourism.
5. Highlight the experience and leadership of Kentucky in the theatre staff at all levels.

Strategy #2: Develop an environment that celebrates the diversity of Kentucky voices.

1. Create programming that highlights the complete range of experiences in Kentucky through authentic storytelling.
 - a. Example: reaching out to a diverse range of voices for inclusion in verbatim plays.
2. Commit to reaching community members who have historically not been able to engage or participate in live professional theatre.
3. Provide resources for neurodivergent or content-sensitive community members.
 - a. List trigger warnings for loud noises, bright lights, etc.
 - b. Provide hearing or attention aids.
 - c. Create educational and informative resources for each production to complement and explain the relevance of the work.
4. Develop opportunities for community engagement and educational and professional development for students and professionals across Kentucky from historically marginalized areas.

Strategy #3: Develop an engaged audience and community across the state.

1. Complete an analysis and survey of the artistic desires and necessities of the state, including a cross-section of Kentucky's population.
2. Offer programming in different geographical regions of the state to reach outside of larger population centers.
 - a. Touring productions, found-space theatre programs in different regions, etc.
3. Create relationships with school systems, cultural institutions, and community groups to provide stories of impact and importance to them.
 - a. Programs offered may complement school curricula or special interest groups.
4. Partner with Kentucky-based theatre and arts groups to reach pre-established audiences and communities.
 - a. Example: Partner with ShPieL Performing Identity to produce a Jewish-Kentuckian story.

Strategy #4: Create institutional visibility to Kentucky residents and tourists.

1. Create a targeted marketing campaign focused on the institution of the theatre prior and during the inaugural seasons.
 - a. Target schools, libraries, and educational groups to reach the youth of Kentucky and to highlight the educational aspect of theatrical storytelling.
2. Market the use of found spaces of Kentucky to reach audiences outside of dedicated theatregoers.
 - a. Example: Producing a show at the Seelbach Hotel opens up the opportunity of bringing hotel guests into the audience.

3. Utilize a range of marketing materials (digital vs. physical, internal and external publications) to reach the widest number of individuals and to display the accessibility of the theatre to diverse audiences.
 - a. A feature on the Kentucky Tourism official website and in Kentucky Welcome Centers
 - b. Presentation of work and/or station at the Kentucky State Fair and Derby Festival events
 - c. Social media accounts: Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, LinkedIn
 - d. Physical resources: Coffee News, community newsletters, brochures

Strategy #5: Create quality educational programming that enhances the creative lives of Kentucky youth.

1. Develop and host a young playwrights festival about Kentucky stories open to a wide range of students.
 - a. Engage with local playwrights as mentors to student participants.
2. Develop a public arts project that hears from schools across the state centered on Kentucky topics that combines theatrical storytelling and visual arts.
 - a. Allows us to hear from Kentucky voices
 - b. Creating physical visual art allows the project to live on and travel to various locations for future productions
 - c. Accomplishes greater visibility of the theatre
3. Develop summer camp programming that combines learning about the history of Kentucky with creating found theatre.
 - a. Participants could choose a Kentucky event or historical figure and a play could be made about their chosen topic, presented at a found location.

About the Strategic Plan:

The 15th Theatre

The name of a theatre begins the process of the organization's institutional image. In choosing the name The 15th Theatre, I look to intrinsically link the organization to Kentucky's history, as Kentucky was the fifteenth state after separating itself from Virginia. I was also careful to avoid something that sounds too similar to a preexisting arts organization in the state or surrounding areas.

Mission

The 15th Theatre serves and celebrates Kentucky- all of Kentucky- through authentic theatrical storytelling from the voices of the state.

This statement is the foundation upon which the entire organization is built. It was imperative to me that it be specific to the state in which it would reside. The mission, while short, allows for the creation of a pathway when making the strategic plan. For instance, by celebrating “all of Kentucky,” it is necessary to include programming that involves regions of Kentucky not often explored. “All of Kentucky” also includes the young people of the state, making the strategic idea of creating educational programming vital to the organization’s identity. The mission also clearly states that this organization is specifically a theatre, rather than something of a wider scope like a performing arts organization. Lastly, the mission clearly states who the artists and administrators of this organization will be- the people of the state, creating an organization by and for Kentuckians.

The 15th Theatre Programmatic Plan

Season	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Sum	<i>Medea</i> adaptation in Mega Caverns^	<i>Confederates</i> at Locust Grove^	<i>Wendell Berry v. Ayn Rand</i> *	Bourbon trail plays^: - <i>Laundry and Bourbon</i> - <i>Bourbon on Broadway</i>	<i>Coal Miner's Daughter</i> play adaptation// <i>Coalmining Today</i> verbatim play*+
			Young Playwrights Festival (presented at KY State Fair)	Young Playwrights Festival	Young Playwrights Festival/ Youth camps plays in found spaces
Fall	<i>Night, Mother</i> by Marsha Norman (tour)	<i>Wynn Cemetery Witches</i> *	<i>Lady in Blue</i> ** at the Seelbach	<i>This Wretched Valley</i> * play adaptation of book by Jenny Kiefer	<i>Red Dog Road</i> Ghost Story*
	Steve Moulds "The Body" (tour)	KPW 10-minute play festival	KPW 10-minute play festival	KPW 10-minute play festival	KPW 10-minute play festival
Winter	<i>Kentucky Christmas: Appalachian Storytelling</i> * (tour)	<i>Kentucky Christmas: Appalachian Storytelling</i> (tour)	<i>Kentucky Christmas: Appalachian Storytelling</i> (tour)	<i>Kentucky Christmas: Appalachian Storytelling</i> (tour)	<i>Kentucky Christmas: Appalachian Storytelling</i> (tour)
			Play featuring Chanukah (collaboration w/ ShPIeL)	<i>First Christmas in Kentucky</i> * in support of local immigration and refugee services	
Spring	<i>Topdog/Underdog</i> by Suzan-Lori Parks	<i>Idlewild</i> aboard the Belle of Louisville**^	<i>Jockey Jim</i> by Larry Muhammad (collab w/ Kentucky Black Repertory)	<i>My Kentucky Home Old and New</i> *+ in partnership with the Stephen Foster Story (tour)	<i>The Sport of Kings</i> (pt. 1)* adapted from the book by C.E. Morgan (tour)
			Derby verbatim play*+		<i>The Sport of Kings</i> (pt. 2)* adapted from C.E. Morgan (tour)

*Commissioned new work

+ verbatim play

^ Kentucky Home Series

Overview

The programmatic plan is a large part of how a theatre actualizes its mission and reaches communities. Because the mission is focused on upholding Kentucky experiences, the programming must reflect this in multiple ways throughout the seasons. While aligned with the mission, the following seasons' programming reflects the time of year in which they are presented in order to best capture community interest. Because of this, certain aspects of the programmatic plan will use a seasonal model, creating programming specific to Halloween and the winter holidays. While the seasonal model of regional theatre has received criticism of stifling creativity and/or ability to produce new work and misalignment with the mission, this theatre will work to create programming that focuses on Kentucky and the creation of new works while maintaining season-specific offerings. Outside of the more widely recognized seasons across the United States, the theatre will work to create a connection with the Kentucky Derby and its season of activities in late Spring/early Summer through the scheduling, themes, and partnerships of productions.

Year One:

The inaugural season must adeptly show the mission of the theatre company and its intrinsic connection to Kentucky. However, the first season does not have the time and resources to adequately support the creation of new complete work. Therefore, during the first season, the company will focus on creating relationships with Kentucky playwrights, businesses, and attractions to build a foundation for its future productions. The season will include Kentucky attractions, tours, and Kentucky playwrights with both established and newer voices represented. Plays produced in specific attractions will fall under the "Kentucky Home Series." The success of this season will determine the future ability of the theatre company to grow and create

relationships with organizations and artists across the state. The following sections provide greater context and explanation of the programmatic choices of the season.

Medea

While *Medea* is an ancient Greek tragedy, it provides many possibilities for Kentucky artists. For instance, a Kentucky scholar and playwright could be commissioned to write a new translated adaptation, achieving the strategy of creating an intrinsic connection to Kentucky. Further, this production would be presented at the Louisville Mega Caverns, a tourist and family attraction in the state that is known to draw crowds, particularly during their Christmas event, Lights Under Louisville. By connecting with the Mega Caverns, our possible audience members include a wider swath of the resident and tourist population in the state, achieving another part of our strategic plan. *Medea* in the caverns provides several artistic opportunities as well, including connecting the show to Plato's discussion of the cave, through use of setting in the Mega Caverns and shadow effects. Adaptation of this classic work also allows a flexibility for a playwright to explore the plot through a Kentucky-based lens, finding ways to adapt language to create connections within the state, similar to several recent adaptive pieces including the Kentucky Opera's 2024 production of *The Pirates of Penzance*.

Synopsis: A brand new adaptation of a classic Greek play, *Medea* follows a woman who is left by her husband Jason who has chosen to remarry the daughter of the king. A jilted Medea chooses to plot revenge upon Jason, resulting in the death of Jason's new wife, the king, and her

own children.”¹⁴

Night, Mother and *The Body*

In the fall, the company presents two productions by Kentucky playwrights that feature the themes of family and grief. These two plays offer short run times (around ninety minutes each), small casts (two performers per play) and simple sets, making them ideal for the company’s first touring productions. Additionally, touring these productions together will allow audiences to experience two different Kentucky playwrights, the established and award-winning playwright Marsha Norman with *Night, Mother* (1983) and contemporary Louisville-based playwright Steve Moulds with *The Body* (2016). Presenting these shows together will show that Kentucky is home to new and old works, both relevant to the human condition today. By producing Kentucky playwrights and touring these productions throughout the state in theatre facilities and community centers, the theatre company will achieve its strategies of creating an intrinsic connection to Kentucky life and developing audiences throughout the state.

Synopsis: *Night, Mother*, Winner of the 1983 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, follows Jessie and her mother on a single night... “As the play begins Jessie asks for her father’s service revolver and calmly announces that she intends to kill herself. At first her mother refuses to take her seriously, but as Jessie sets about tidying the house and making lists of things to be looked after, her sense of desperate helplessness begins to build. In the end, with the inexorability of genuine tragedy, she can only stand by, stunned and unbelieving, as Jessie quietly closes and locks her bedroom door and ends her profound unhappiness in one fatal, stunning and deeply disturbing

¹⁴Euripides. Trans. Coleridge, E.P. (2000). *Medea*. The Internet Classics Archive.
<https://classics.mit.edu/Euripides/medea.html>

moment.”¹⁵

Synopsis: *The Body* presents the story of Joe and stepdaughter Abby during a week where Mom is away. “A giant crate appears on their doorstep, and Abby and Joe work to decipher its mysterious contents – a doll with no face, and an instruction manual with no words. The deeper they delve into this package, the more it threatens their family’s tenuous emotional equilibrium. Was this doll sent to strengthen their relationship? Or is it a harbinger of a more disturbing truth? Part domestic drama, part surreal thriller, *The Body* lives in that space between reality and dreams, where the things that haunt us most come from within.”¹⁶

Kentucky Christmas: Appalachian Storytelling

This Christmas presentation marks the theatre company’s first new work. Collaborating with Kentucky bluegrass musicians and Appalachian storytellers, this touring production will strive to set the theatre company’s holiday tradition. It is essential to this production that the creative team is made up of people who grew up in Appalachia to show dedication to authenticity and respect for Kentucky. By producing this Christmas presentation and working to make it a successful tradition, the company upholds the storytelling culture that is unique to this area. The theatre company has the opportunity to connect with Appalachian special interest groups and the arts and media nonprofit Appalshop to ensure the positive impact of this production. By employing Kentucky musicians and storytellers to develop and present this production and touring across the state, the company achieves multiple implementation items in

¹⁵Norman, M. (1981). *Night, Mother*. Dramatists Play Service, Inc. <https://www.dramatists.com/cgi-bin/db/single.asp?key=455>

¹⁶ Moulds, S. (2016). *The Body*. New Play Exchange. <https://newplayexchange.org/plays/50755/body>

the strategic plan.

Synopsis: Through bluegrass music and spoken word, Appalachian storytellers embody the spirit of Christmas in Kentucky. Telling stories and legends of Christmas in the state, this is a joyous journey through the history of the winter holidays in Appalachia.

Topdog/Underdog

This Pulitzer Prize-winning play, written by Suzan-Lori Parks, born in Fort Knox, Kentucky, rounds out the inaugural season. Presenting the story of two Black brothers, this show embodies that Kentucky voices are diverse, impactful, and successful inside and outside the state. Following the protests in 2020 surrounding the murder of Breonna Taylor, it is necessary to recognize the systemic racial issues and uphold Black Kentucky voices as important as and representative of the state as their white counterparts. This production offers the opportunity to reach out to special interest groups and arts organizations including Kentucky Black Repertory Theatre and Redline Performing Arts to ensure that the creative team addresses the story with authenticity and respect.

Synopsis: “A darkly comic fable of brotherly love and family identity, *Topdog/Underdog* tells the story of Lincoln and Booth, two brothers whose names, given to them as a joke, foretell a lifetime of sibling rivalry and resentment. Haunted by their past, the brothers are forced to confront the shattering reality of their future.”¹⁷

Strategic Alignment

¹⁷*Topdog/Underdog*, by Suzan-Lori Parks. The Pulitzer Prizes. (2002). <https://www.pulitzer.org/winners/suzan-lori-parks>

Year 1	S1 (Kentucky)	S2 (Diversity)	S3 (Audiences)	S4 (Visibility)	S5 (Education)
<i>Medea</i>	X (adaptor, Mega Caverns)		X (reach out to KY Shakes)	X (Mega Caverns- tourists)	
<i>Night, Mother</i>	X (playwright)				
<i>The Body</i>	X (playwright)				
Christmas Collab	X	X (Appalachia)	X (touring)		
<i>Topdog/Underdog</i>	X (playwright)	X			

The table below the programmatic descriptions concisely display how each programmatic choice aligns with the strategic goals of the theatre company. The company strives for each production to achieve multiple goals simultaneously.

Year Two:

In the company's second season, it must show that the commitments established in the first year will continue and expand. Therefore, the season will continue to be made up of Kentucky playwrights and productions will be presented at Kentucky attractions. The second year will benefit from the outreach done in the first season, allowing our programming to include more engagement with the artistic community with a new 10-minute play festival, in collaboration with the Kentucky Playwrights Workshop (KPW), providing new and working Kentucky playwrights the chance to see their work produced, growing with KPW's existing playwriting contest.¹⁸ The second season will also include the first state and world premieres of the company: a Halloween play featuring Kentucky lore, and a historical look at one of the Nation's Historical Landmarks, the Belle of Louisville. Our second season will build on the first,

¹⁸ *Kentucky Playwrights Workshop*. KPW. (2024). <https://www.kyplays.org/>

allowing more focus on the audience and institutional visibility implementation items of our five-year strategic plan.

Confederates

Starting the season, *Confederates*, a play that presents the story of a contemporary Black professor and the story of an enslaved woman, will be presented at Historic Locust Grove. While the playwright is not based in Kentucky, the story presented is relevant to Kentucky, as it participated in the slave trade and has systemic race issues that continue to this day. By presenting this production at Locust Grove, a location of enslaved communities, the theatre company hopes to help reclaim the humanity and empathy for those enslaved and to address the contemporary issues that result from the slave trade. It is essential that this production work in collaboration with local Black communities and artists.

Synopsis: “Two Black American women – an enslaved rebel and a professor at a contemporary university – are having parallel experiences of institutional racism, though they live over a century apart. Tony-nominated playwright Dominique Morisseau's exacting new play explores the reins that racial and gender bias still hold over American educational systems today.”¹⁹

Wynn Cemetery Witches

The first entirely new work produced by the theatre company will be a Halloween treat that dives into the lore of the Wynn Cemetery Witches. Wynn Cemetery, listed as a haunted Kentucky location, is locally believed to be the site of the hanging and burial of several witches. These witches, according to legend, haunt the cemetery around the date of their deaths.²⁰ The

¹⁹Morisseau, D. (2023). *Confederates*. Concord Theatricals. <https://www.concordtheatricals.com/p/95024/confederates>

²⁰ Shockley, J. (2022, December 25). *16 haunted cemeteries in Kentucky that give you goosebumps*. Only In Your State. <https://www.onlyinyourstate.com/kentucky/16-cemeteries-in-ky/>

theatre company would commission a Kentucky-based playwright to create this piece. Because the legend lacks a lot of specificity, a playwright will have ample opportunity to be creative in their use of this material. Themes and motifs of the play could include female rage, perception, and persecution of women during and after the witch hunts. The popularity of witches in modern entertainment allows for contemporary references to keep the play light enough for Halloween entertainment.

Synopsis: Buried in concrete, the witches of Wynn Cemetery rise from their graves every year as dark apparitions, conducting their unknown rituals in perpetuity. Two cemetery trespassers get caught in the middle of the witches' rituals and must uncover the truth about these witches to survive the night. But what is the truth? Is it too far buried in the past? Who are the real witches and monsters? Flashing between the past and the present, the truth of the Wynn Cemetery Witches will be discovered.

KPW 10 Minute Play Festival

The Kentucky Playwrights Workshop, a preexisting playwriting group, has a yearly contest for the best ten minute plays written by Kentucky-based playwrights. While the contest creates visibility for these playwrights through public readings, the plays written largely do not have the chance for full production currently. By Year 2, the company will work to create relationships with KPW to annually host the production of the winning ten minute plays in a short festival to provide further opportunities for Kentucky playwrights to be seen by audiences. This festival would include the first, second, and third place winners, as well as two to three honorable mentions, to achieve six produced plays for a run time of around sixty minutes. The contest winners are generally announced in the early summer, giving the theatre company time to

connect playwrights with local directors and actors to develop the production of their pieces for the fall season.

Synopsis: Presenting the winners of the Kentucky Playwrights Workshop, this ten-minute play festival showcases the talent of Kentucky- in all areas of the theatrical process from page to stage.

Kentucky Christmas: Appalachian Storytelling

In the second season, it is important to present this Christmas programming to begin making this an annual family tradition for audiences. Because of this form of storytelling, it is easy to add new songs and storytelling to keep the content fresh while maintaining the authenticity of Appalachia. Further, this production has the ability to expand or contract depending on the resources available, making it a flexible portion of our annual programming. As with Year 1, the touring of this production will allow the theatre company to meet several institutional goals of maintaining the Kentucky connection, importance of diverse voices, and reaching outside of the major population centers of the state.

Synopsis: Through bluegrass music and spoken word, Appalachian storytellers embody the spirit of Christmas in Kentucky. Telling stories and legends of Christmas in the state, this is a joyous journey through the history of the winter holidays in Appalachia.

Idlewild

The Belle of Louisville is one of the oldest running steamboats in the United States and is listed as a National Historic Landmark.²¹ However, it has a long, complex history predating its

²¹*The History of the Belle*. Belle of Louisville Riverboats. (2024, January 4). <https://www.belleoflouisville.org/belle-of-louisville/>

rebranding as the Belle of Louisville. Originally named Idlewild, the steamboat has a complex connection with racial segregation in America. In the 1930s, the boat served as a ferry between Rose Island and downtown Louisville to Fontaine Ferry, a segregated and exclusionary amusement park. During World War II, the boat served as a nightclub for enlisted men. Following the war and a period of disrepair, the steamboat has become a traditional part of the Kentucky Derby and a stalwart aspect of the downtown Louisville environment. By presenting a portion of the historical truth of the boat with a fictionalized storyline, the theatre company will be able to continue the Kentucky Home series, commission a new work, and create a relationship with an essential Kentucky landmark and audience members.

Synopsis: All aboard the Idlewild Steamboat! Journey through the history of one boat as the world changes around it. Through its connection to the dark past of Louisville's segregation and its nightlife throughout World War II, experience and become part of the history of the Belle of Louisville.

Year 2	S1 (Kentucky)	S2 (Diversity)	S3 (Audiences)	S4 (Visibility)	S5 (Education)
<i>Confederates</i>	X (Locust Grove)	X	X	X	
Wynn Cemetery Witches new work	X (playwright, setting)			X	
KPW 10 Minute Plays	X (playwrights)	X			
Christmas Collab	X	X	X (tour)		
<i>Idlewild</i>	X (Kentucky Home)	X	X	X	

Year Three:

The company's third season marks the beginning of scaffolding in the commitment to educational programming while maintaining the growth and belief in new work by Kentucky playwrights. The company's major accomplishment in terms of education will be through the first annual Young Playwrights Festival, providing students from elementary through high school with the opportunity to see their work produced. The company will strive to give student participants opportunities to connect with local artists and playwrights for mentoring and networking as the students go through the writing and producing stage of their work. In our main season, the company will commission three new works by Kentucky playwrights on diverse themes ranging from the battle between capitalist and socialist ideals in the Kentucky landscape in *Wendell Berry v. Ayn Rand*, to a look at the local legend of the *Lady in Blue* who haunts the Seelbach Hotel, to an authentic look at the Kentucky Derby in the voices of Kentuckians. We will continue our Appalachian Christmas tradition while collaborating with the Jewish intersectional theatre company ShPIeL Performing Identity to produce a play that features and celebrates Chanukah. To round out our third season, we will show two sides of the famous Kentucky Derby, one established, celebratory story in *Jockey Jim*, and the creation of a verbatim play about the darker side of the horse race- from human trafficking to the effects on the neighborhoods surrounding Churchill Downs. This season centers on the authenticity of our storytelling: celebrating the pride of the state, including our youth and our unique traditions, while also holding a mirror up to the realities of historic and present day Kentucky.

Wendell Berry v. Ayn Rand

This new commissioned show will present a fictionalized argument between Wendell Berry, a Kentucky writer focused on agrarian lifestyle, sustainability, and community, and Ayn Rand, the objectivist philosopher who celebrates laissez faire capitalism and individualism.

Presented in a style similar to *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*, this play will strive to examine the differing ideologies present in the US and in a microcosm in Kentucky. The incredibly differing values of these two writers will allow for quick, witty debate and conflict that can connect with audiences of any economic or personal ideology. By utilizing the work of Wendell Berry, a famous Kentuckian and commissioning a Kentucky playwright, the theatre company will continue to achieve its programmatic strategy of connecting to Kentucky life. This show will also be able to tour across the state, allowing the company to achieve its strategic imperative of reaching areas across the state. The subject matter of this show would also allow for a possible partnership with the Berry Center, a nonprofit that works to support sustainable farming, education opportunities for farming families, and local healthy economies.²²

Synopsis: In the wake of climate change and recessions, what is the right way forward? With fake news and globalization, who can you believe? How do we save our small towns? How do we progress? Is progress a dirty word? Are these the right questions? Wendell Berry, Kentucky ecologist, meets Ayn Rand, capitalist philosopher in a heated debate in an attempt to make sense of a world that throws questions out constantly with few concrete answers.

Young Playwrights Festival

One of the theatre company's core strategies is developing quality educational programming for the youth of Kentucky. To that end, the company will create and host a Young Playwrights Festival. Submissions will be open to elementary through high school-aged students. Student playwrights will be split into three age categories: elementary (grades 1-5), middle school (grades 6-8) and high school (grades 9-12). Those who want to participate will submit their short plays (10-30 minutes) to the theatre, where they will be reviewed. Finalists will be

²²*About Us*. The Berry Center. (2023, October 10). <https://berrycenter.org/about/#about-history>

picked from these groups, and these finalists will be matched with adult playwrights and theatre artists mentors who will work with the students to network and provide advice on their work. Depending on the content of the plays, the student playwrights may be matched with winners of the KPW play festivals from previous years or from specific theatre backgrounds (example: a play featuring Jewish themes getting matched with ShPIeL Performing Identity). After a period of time working and revising the chosen plays, the theatre will choose the top three plays within each age group. Winners will have their plays produced by the theatre company. Because this festival will take place in the summer, the theatre company has an opportunity to have the presentation of the winning plays at the Kentucky State Fair to enhance visibility of the company and provide a unique opportunity to young people.

Lady in Blue

Continuing the Kentucky Home series, this show will be presented at the Seelbach Hotel in downtown Louisville, the setting of the show. Throughout the Seelbach Hotel's long history, the story of the lady in blue persists, largely due to the work of Larry Johnson, former bellman and current hotel historian.²³ According to his account in the book *The Seelbach: A Centennial Salute to Louisville's Grand Hotel*, the ghost of Patricia Wilson (now known to be Pearl Elliot), a young woman whose body was found in an elevator shaft in 1936, has been seen by several guests of the hotel, becoming an intrinsic part of the hotel's mythology. By creating a show to be presented around Halloween, the theatre company could build upon the work of Larry Johnson who has created ghost tours and hosted school groups. This production, similar to *Idlewild*, allows the company to tell Kentucky stories in the location of their creation. The production

²³Brown, A. N. (2021, October 27). *Who was the Seelbach Hotel's "lady in blue?" ask Larry Johnson*. Spectrum News 1. <https://spectrumnews1.com/ky/louisville/news/2021/10/23/seelbach-hotel-historian-collects-decades-of-information-on-the-lady-in-blue>

would take place in the Rathskeller, the basement of the hotel, helping to increase our institutional visibility to hotel guests and foot traffic in the hotel to create a mutually beneficial experience.

Synopsis: She walks the halls at night, a beautiful woman in a long blue dress. After one tragic night in 1936, Patricia Wilson now haunts the Seelbach Hotel, a spirit searching for a way out in an attempt to prove she did not commit suicide- she was murdered. But by whom? Travel back to 1936 to discover who killed the Lady in Blue.

KPW 10 Minute Play Festival

The theatre company will strive to continue its relationship with the Kentucky Playwrights Workshop to continuously provide a space for new voices through the production of the winners of the KPW's annual contest. As we continue producing the winning plays chosen by the KPW, we hope to create personal connections with the playwrights, giving them more opportunities, perhaps in our commissioned new works or by becoming mentors for our Youth Playwrights Festival. With the repetition of hosting these ten minute productions, the visibility and credibility of the play festival and the KPW will grow. This will hopefully lead to an increase in diverse voices and larger participation in both play submissions and audience numbers.

Synopsis: Presenting the winners of the Kentucky Playwrights Workshop, this ten-minute play festival showcases the talent of Kentucky- in all areas of the theatrical process from page to stage.

Kentucky Christmas: Appalachian Storytelling

The third season will continue the theatre company's Appalachian Christmas tradition. The flexibility of the storytelling form will allow edits and new stories to be added to keep the

experience fresh for audiences. Because of this form of storytelling, it is easy to add new songs and storytelling to keep the content fresh while maintaining the authenticity of Appalachia. As with Years 1 and 2, the touring of this production will allow the theatre company to meet several institutional goals of maintaining the Kentucky connection, importance of diverse voices, and reaching outside of the major population centers of the state.

Synopsis: Through bluegrass music and spoken word, Appalachian storytellers embody the spirit of Christmas in Kentucky. Telling stories and legends of Christmas in the state, this is a joyous journey through the history of the winter holidays in Appalachia.

Chanukah Production with ShPIeL Performing Identity

In our commitment to upholding diverse voices of Kentucky, the theatre company strives to create opportunities for authentic stories to be told. To that end, the theatre company will partner with ShPIeL Performing Identity, a Louisville-based theatre company focused on Jewish and intersectional theatre to co-produce a play featuring Chanukah to fit in with the winter holiday season.²⁴ Particularly in this decade when anti-Semitism is ongoingly present, it is important to produce shows that feature Jewish joy. As a collaboration with ShPIeL, it is important to hear their input when either commissioning or finding an existing play to produce in conjunction with their company. Similar to our other holiday offering, Kentucky Christmas, this production would tour the state, either following the same circuit or touring to synagogues across the state. This partnership will be mutually beneficial, as both companies will gain visibility with each other's audiences.

²⁴ *Home*. ShPIeL Performing Identity. (2023, December 22). <https://www.shpielperformingidentity.com/>

Jockey Jim

Written by Larry Muhammad, a Louisville-based Black playwright and producing director of Kentucky Black Repertory Theatre, this show presents the story of Jimmy Winkfield, a Black jockey. Producing this play gives the theatre company an opportunity to connect with a respected and established Kentucky playwright during the season of the Kentucky Derby. It is important to include Black voices on the creative team for this production to ensure authenticity. By doing this production close to Derby, the company has the chance to connect with tourists and horse racing fans. There are opportunities to create relationships with Churchill Downs, the Kentucky Derby Festival organization, and horse farms throughout the state. Interacting with the Kentucky Derby throughout this play allows the company to achieve multiple goals, including upholding diverse Kentucky voices and creating visibility throughout the state and to tourists.

Synopsis: “Black jockeys are a rare sight today, but they dominated the formative years of the Kentucky Derby, winning 15 of the first 28, including the inaugural run May 17, 1875, and establishing the Run for the Roses as the world's premier horse racing event. One of the most illustrious was Jimmy Winkfield, Derby winner in 1901 and 1902 and member of the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame. He racked up 2,600 racetrack victories from Moscow to Warsaw to Paris, helped evacuate the racing community from Russia during the Bolshevik revolution, married an heiress, retired a prosperous trainer in France after escaping the NAZI invasion in World War II. Based on the amazing career of the first American jockey to become a globetrotting superstar, the play is a fascinating horseracing saga spanning two continents and six decades. Fifteen costumed actors bring the tale vividly to life with dazzling portrayals of Winkfield, his aristocratic wife Lyddy, their celebrity expat friends Paul Robeson, Josephine Baker and Bing Crosby, Russian and German military officers, wealthy Polish and Armenian

backers, U.S. stable hands and a bigoted horse farm owner. Audiences hear turf strategy, feel the pre-race excitement filled with backside intrigue and fortunes changing hands against the backdrop of 20th century war and upheaval.”²⁵

Derby Verbatim Play

While the Kentucky Derby is a celebration for the state of Kentucky, bringing in tourists and media attention, creating annual traditions for families, and boosting the local economy, many people have valid criticisms of the horse race and surrounding events. This production would go out into a diverse range of Kentucky communities to include as many opinions on the Derby as possible- from the celebratory to the critical. These voices would include people living close to the track, directly impacted by the Derby, to those out in the rural areas of the state who may be less familiar. We would also include a wide age range, including schools in this, allowing students to be interviewed or write in about their opinions on the Kentucky Derby. After spending considerable time collecting different voices, the quotes would be compiled and made into a narrative verbatim play to be presented alongside *Jockey Jim* during the Kentucky Derby season. Creating this verbatim play will have an inherent connection to Kentucky through subject matter and voice, highlighting the diversity of opinion and experience in the state.

Synopsis: The Kentucky Derby has a long history and casts a long shadow in horse racing. But what are the realities of “the most exciting two minutes in sports” in Kentucky? In the voices of real Kentuckians, explore the Derby festival like never before.

²⁵ Muhammad, L. (2016). *Jockey Jim*. New Play Exchange. <https://newplayexchange.org/plays/1231218/jockey-jim>

Year 3	S1 (Kentucky)	S2 (Diversity)	S3 (Audiences)	S4 (Visibility)	S5 (Education)
<i>Wendell Berry v. Ayn Rand</i>	X (plot, playwright)		X (tour)		
Young Playwrights Festival	X	X		X	X
<i>Lady in Blue</i>	X (Kentucky home)			X	
KPW 10 minute plays	X	X			
<i>Kentucky Christmas</i>	X	X	X (tour)		
Chanukah Play w/ ShPIeL	X	X	X		
<i>Jockey Jim</i>	X	X		X	
Derby verbatim	X	X		X	

Year Four:

The fourth season continues the work of the previous years to uphold diverse voices and establish quality educational programming. This year will continue our largest educational endeavor in the Youth Playwrights Festival, producing their work and connecting them with the Kentucky arts community. As the company grows, connecting our main theatrical programming with educational opportunities becomes essential. Educational opportunities will include interactive lectures on immigration in conjunction with a new work highlighting the holiday experience for immigrants in refugees in Kentucky and participation in a new verbatim play, *My Kentucky Home: Old and New*, an examination of Stephen Foster's song's place in modern Kentucky culture. Continuing our commitment to new work, we will adapt Jenny Kiefer's novel

This Wretched Valley, a horror story set in the Kentucky wilderness for our Halloween season offering. The company will also continue its Kentucky Home series with two summer offerings presented through a tour along the bourbon trail at different distilleries. The company will also continue its partnership with KPW through the ten minute play festival and its Christmas tradition of Appalachian storytelling.

Bourbon Trail Plays

Bourbon plays a strong role in Kentucky's history and economy and is a growing part of the state's tourism. The two plays produced this summer, *Laundry and Bourbon* and *Bourbon on Broadway* will be presented along the Bourbon Trail, made up of 18 distilleries around the state.²⁶ Connecting with the bourbon industry in the state will allow the company to reach tourists and tour to different parts of the state as part of the Kentucky Home series. As both plays selected are short and have simple production needs, they are excellent choices for this kind of touring experience. By producing these plays in the summer, the company hopes to benefit from the peak season of tourism. Because Kentucky is considered the birthplace of bourbon, the choice of productions and touring helps the state tourism industry while helping the company achieve its goals considering Kentucky life, audience outreach, and visibility.

Synopses: *Laundry and Bourbon* is set on "the front porch of Roy and Elizabeth's home in Maynard, Texas, on a hot summer afternoon. Elizabeth and her friend Hattie are whiling away the time folding laundry, watching TV, sipping bourbon and Coke, and gossiping about the many open secrets which are so much a part of small-town life. They are joined by the self-righteous Amy Lee who, among other tidbits, can't resist blurting out that Roy has been seen around town with another woman. While the ensuing conversation is increasingly edged with bitter humor,

²⁶*Kentucky bourbon trail® itinerary*. Kentucky Bourbon Trail. (2024, February 8). <https://kybourbontrail.com/itineraries/kentucky-bourbon-trail/>

from it emerges a sense of Elizabeth's inner strength and her quiet understanding of the turmoil which has beset her husband since his return from Vietnam. He is wild, and he is unfaithful, but he needs her, and she loves him. And she'll be waiting for him when he comes home—no matter what others may say or think.”²⁷

“*Bourbon on Broadway* is a cabaret-styled, one-hour, satirical romp about a group of early Americans who overcome adversity while inadvertently inventing Bourbon and becoming accidental pioneers on the road to social justice. The lively narrative unfolds through the character's songs, which each have a different style, nodding to great moments in musical theater and pop culture. Writer Suzan Fiering has created four lovable characters: Elijah Craig, a white Northern Baptist abolitionist preacher; Frances Craig, a transplanted Connecticut housewife; William Craig, an educated enslaved person; and Cousin Cornelius Craig, a cross-dressing fashionista.”²⁸

Young Playwrights Festival

In its second year, the Youth Playwrights Festival will work to gain more visibility across the state for both submissions and attendance at the winners' productions. It is essential for outreach to extend across the state, including to those in rural areas. Finalists from these areas must have opportunity for mentorships and to see their work produced in their community, meaning the theatre company will need to be flexible in when and where the pieces are performed, not just in a large population area like Louisville. The production of pieces may be presented at the Kentucky State Fair for wider visibility and presented in accessible areas for the

²⁷McLure, J. (1981). *Laundry and Bourbon*. Dramatists Play Service, Inc. <https://www.dramatists.com/cgi-bin/db/single.asp?key=380>

²⁸Fiering, S. (2023). *About this Show- Bourbon on Broadway*. Theater Mania. <https://www.theatermania.com/>

winners' communities as needed.

This Wretched Valley

Many stories about Kentucky are in the form of books. The theatre company looks to Louisville's Butcher Cabin Books owner, Jenny Kiefer's debut novel for its new Halloween offering. This novel is a horror story set on the cliff faces of the Kentucky wilderness and has gained media attention from the New York Times and Publisher's Weekly. By commissioning an adaptation of this novel, the theatre company will tell a story from a Kentuckian about the Kentucky landscape, achieving its mission of upholding Kentucky voices. This story may also bring attention to Kentucky's wildlife, adding to the visibility of ecotourism in the state.

Synopsis: Adapted from Jenny Kiefer's debut novel: A contemporary climbing expedition goes wrong, as three bodies are discovered seven months after a climbing group came to the area, and one member remains missing. "[The bodies] are in various states of decay: one a stark, white skeleton; the second emptied of its organs; and the third a mutilated corpse with the tongue, eyes, ears, and fingers removed...Were the climbers murdered? Did they succumb to cannibalism? Or are their impossible bodies the work of an even more sinister force? This dread-inducing debut builds to a bloodcurdling climax, and will leave you shocked by the final twist."²⁹

KPW 10 Minute Play Festival

The theatre company will strive to continue its relationship with the Kentucky Playwrights Workshop to continuously provide a space for new voices through the production of the winners of the KPW's annual contest. As this annual tradition continues, the theatre company will look at providing opportunities to new professionals in the area for stage management,

²⁹Kiefer, J. (2024). *This wretched valley by Jenny Kiefer*. Penguin Random House.
<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/730666/this-wretched-valley-by-jenny-kiefer/>

design, and directorial experience in the process of production. As we continue to highlight new Kentucky voices, we must include every aspect of the storytelling process, expanding focus from the playwright to the whole creative team.

Synopsis: Presenting the winners of the Kentucky Playwrights Workshop, this ten-minute play festival showcases the talent of Kentucky- in all areas of the theatrical process from page to stage.

Kentucky Christmas: Appalachian Storytelling

The theatre company will continue the Appalachian Christmas storytelling tradition. As this has become an annual tradition, the theatre company will turn attention to providing educational opportunities in conjunction with this production. Schools will be invited to performances and will have the opportunity to learn about the history of Appalachia and the culture of oral storytelling. The production will continue to tour and continue achieving the core strategies of the company as it grows its educational component.

Synopsis: Through bluegrass music and spoken word, Appalachian storytellers embody the spirit of Christmas in Kentucky. Telling stories and legends of Christmas in the state, this is a joyous journey through the history of the winter holidays in Appalachia.

First Christmas in Kentucky

Kentucky is the largest resettlement state per capita for immigrants and refugees.³⁰

Kentucky offers several resources for immigrants, including Kentucky Refugee Ministries and

³⁰ Dyssegaard Kallick, D. (2023, March). *Refugee Resettlement per Capita: Which States Do the Most?* Immigration Research Initiative. <https://immresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/Refugees-per-capita-2013-to-2023-1.pdf>

La Casita. This newly commissioned work, presented during the winter holiday season will highlight the immigrant experience of the first winter season in a new country, particularly in a state that predominantly celebrates Christmas. The production will strive to hit upon issues of immigrants who are not Christian living in an environment where Christmas is celebrated as a religious and secular experience, as well as Christian immigrants celebrating away from the homes in which they have created their holiday traditions. This production will work to show the humanity and joy of immigrants during a season that calls for community and mutual regard for humankind. The creative team will strive to respect the lived experience of immigrants and refugees, ensuring that the story is authentic. The theatre company will provide visibility for the services available to immigrants and refugees and educational resources about the importance of immigration and refugee policy and cultural mindset reform. It is essential to include an educational component in this show, to provide a space for young people to ask questions and relate their experiences to people from backgrounds different from their own.

Synopsis: Welcome to America! Happy holidays! What next? Follow the interrelated stories of immigrants as they celebrate their first holiday season in the US with holiday mishaps, joy, and love.

My Kentucky Home: Old and New

The song “My Old Kentucky Home,” written by Stephen Foster has a long, controversial history in Kentucky.³¹ While it is the state song, it comes out of the minstrel tradition, mired in racism and nostalgia for the Old South. A politicized issue, the state and its culture has had to

³¹ Finn, C. (2020, September 7). “*My old Kentucky home*” by Stephen Foster. Song of America. <https://songofamerica.net/song/my-old-kentucky-home/>

reflect on where and how to address the use of this song, particularly at the Kentucky Derby, where it is traditionally played before the horse race. The song is also part of the foundation of The Stephen Foster Story annually presented in Bardstown, Kentucky.³² This production would interview people across political lines and racial identity to get an understanding of contemporary feelings toward the song and how we as a state go forward. The theatre company will include an educational component to this production, making sure to include young people's thoughts on the song while providing educational materials about the history of the song and the problematic minstrel tradition. This production will coincide with the Derby season to reach people as they examine how the Kentucky Derby addresses the song. The theatre company will connect with the Stephen Foster Story to present the show in Bardstown as well as near the Derby festivities. Through this work, the theatre company will achieve strategic goals concerning Kentucky connection, diversity, visibility, and education.

Synopsis: What does "My Old Kentucky Home" mean to you? Kentucky's state song is the subject of controversy, but what do people actually think about it? Where does it belong in our culture? Is it time for a new Kentucky home? This play, created through the quotes of real Kentuckians, will address the song's past, present, and future.

³² *History*. The Stephen Foster Story. (2021, August 13). <https://www.stephenfoster.com/history/>

Year 4	S1 (Kentucky)	S2 (Diversity)	S3 (Audiences)	S4 (Visibility)	S5 (Education)
Bourbon Trail Plays	X (locations)		X (tour)	X (tourism)	
Young Playwrights Festival	X	X		X	X
<i>This Wretched Valley</i>	X			X	
KPW 10 Minute play festival	X	X			
Kentucky Christmas	X	X	X		X
First Christmas in Kentucky	X	X			X
My Kentucky Home: Old and New	X	X		X	X

Year Five:

This season is the culmination of the work of the strategic plan. By the company's fifth season, it must measure its success by each of its core values and its implemented strategic items. The programmatic offerings of this season will have developed educational offerings for students across the state to widen the impact of the company's storytelling. These educational opportunities include learning about Loretta Lynn and the contemporary perspective on coalmining in an adaptation of *Coal Miner's Daughter* and a newly commissioned verbatim play, the annual Young Playwrights Festival, connections to Appalachia's culture during the season's *Kentucky Christmas*, and Kentucky's horse-raising history during our run of the newly adapted *The Sport of Kings*. During the fall, the company will offer a newly commissioned play about the ghost of Red Dog Road in Harlan, Kentucky. The company will also continue its

annual tradition of producing new Kentucky playwrights during the KPW Ten Minute Play Festival. As the company goes through its fifth season, it will examine its successes and areas for needed growth as it develops its plan for the next five years.

Coal Miner's Daughter

The song *Coal Miner's Daughter* tells the truthful story of its writer Loretta Lynn, including specific details of her childhood in Butcher Holler, Kentucky. Her story was adapted into the award-winning movie of the same name, starring Sissy Spacek. By adapting the song to the stage, the theatre company hopes to bring attention back to the hollers of Kentucky, particularly as these communities continue to struggle as the coal-mining industry declines and the hollers see increased flooding.³³ It is important to represent the people of Eastern Kentucky, particularly a woman who gained national success as a songwriter by authentically telling her story as a Kentuckian. This production will include outreach and support for the agencies and foundations that support Eastern Kentucky communities, including the Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky, and an educational component that will explore the life of Loretta Lynn and the historical coal-mining industry. The subject matter and the community engagement surrounding this play will allow the company to start off its fifth season strong by achieving its strategies of Kentucky connection, audience outreach, institutional visibility, and educational programming.

Synopsis: “Well, I was borned a coal miner's daughter/ In a cabin, on a hill in Butcher Holler.” Experience the story of Loretta Lynn in this newly adapted stage version of her famous song *Coal Miner's Daughter*.

³³Klesta, M. (2023, September 27). *Resilience and Recovery: Insights from the July 2022 Eastern Kentucky Flood*. Community Development Reports. <https://www.clevelandfed.org/publications/cd-reports/2023/20230927-resilience-and-recovery>

Coalmining Today Verbatim Play

While the adaptation of *Coal Miner's Daughter* will show an individual story and a historic look at the coal-mining industry, this newly commissioned verbatim play will travel Kentucky to get a comprehensive understanding of residents' perspective on the contemporary state of coalmining. Perspectives will include a diverse range of age, racial demographics, political spectrum, and location within the state, giving voice to those from coal communities and larger population centers. This play will probe into questions of environmental sustainability, the economic reality of Kentucky, and opinions on the path forward concerning coal use. This verbatim play will be produced alongside *Coal Miner's Daughter* in the summer to show the programmatic connection between the two productions and to provide opportunities for educational outreach to overlap. By doing so, this production will be able to share the same strategic success as the *Coal Miner's Daughter* adaptation.

Synopsis: In the real voices of Kentuckians, explore the coal industry today and how we as a state grapple with the past, present, and future of coal in Kentucky.

Young Playwrights Festival

In its third year, the Youth Playwrights Festival will work to continue to gain traction with the youth of the state. As we gain more visibility, we can turn to providing mentorship to not only the playwrights but to students interested in the theatre industry, particularly in technical, stage management, and directorial roles. We can also connect with other youth-based organizations to create relationships, including Louisville Youth Group and Arts Angle Vantage, an organization that mentors and publishes high school students' pieces on arts journalism.³⁴ The Young Playwrights Festival will strive to be an integrated experience for young people, to

³⁴ Kramer, E. (2023). *About*. Arts Angle Vantage. <https://www.artsanglevantage.org/>

provide a space for them to experience and create their own art.

Red Dog Road

The company's tradition of staging the legends of Kentucky continues in this newly commissioned work about Red Dog Road, a haunted street in Harlan, Kentucky.³⁵ According to the story, a miner accidentally shot the wrong man on Red Dog Road in the 1930s, and now the ghost of the dead man continues his search for his killer. The simplicity of this story allows our commissioned playwright creative freedom, and it will also allow for an ease in touring to reach areas around the state during the Halloween season. The story's connection to the coal industry through the characters in the pieces will align well with this season's opening offerings, creating a cohesive start to the fifth season.

Synopsis: One rule: don't stop at Red Dog Road at night. As people start to go missing along Red Dog Road, it becomes imperative to learn the truth of the dark specter that haunts the lane.

KPW 10 Minute Play Festival

Continuing its relationship with Kentucky Playwrights Workshop, the fifth season will host the annual ten minute play festival. This year's festival will focus on community outreach, using the subject matter of the plays as a launching point for those to whom the company should engage. For instance, a play featuring queer themes may benefit from connecting with Louisville Youth Group, or a play featuring themes or motifs about art may benefit from connecting with the Speed Art Museum. The theatre company will strive to make community connections to integrate the festival into the arts and community landscape of the state.

³⁵Dobbs, F. (2021, October 26). *Haunted trail of the Kentucky wildlands*. The Kentucky Wildlands. <https://www.explorekywildlands.com/blog/post/haunted-trail-of-the-kentucky-wildlands/>

Synopsis: Presenting the winners of the Kentucky Playwrights Workshop, this ten-minute play festival showcases the talent of Kentucky- in all areas of the theatrical process from page to stage.

Kentucky Christmas: Appalachian Storytelling

The theatre company will continue the Appalachian Christmas storytelling tradition and its commitment to connecting theatrical and storytelling experiences with educational opportunities. The production will continue to tour and continue achieving the core strategies of the company as it grows its educational component. As the tradition continues and grows, this production will seek to become a supporter of agencies and foundations that support Appalachia, including the Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky. Because of the strong focus on coal during this season, special effort may be made to include songs that feature the stories of coal miners in the area.

Synopsis: Through bluegrass music and spoken word, Appalachian storytellers embody the spirit of Christmas in Kentucky. Telling stories and legends of Christmas in the state, this is a joyous journey through the history of the winter holidays in Appalachia.

The Sport of Kings (Parts 1 and 2)

To conclude the fifth season and the life of the company's first strategic plan, the company will adapt C.E. Morgan's award-winning novel *The Sport of Kings* into two stage productions. Because the novel provides an in-depth exploration of multiple generations of a family, this story is best served by splitting it into two separate shows to allow several aspects and issues to be highlighted in each. The story focuses on a family's journey from farmers into

successful horse-raisers in Kentucky. The novel also touches on the racism present throughout horse racing's history. Due to the nature of this story, it will be produced throughout the Derby season, capitalizing on the media and tourist attention of the race and festivities to reach the widest range of people. To achieve the company's goal of educational programming, the company will invite schools to attend the show and participate in workshops surrounding the history of the Derby. This show will also provide an opportunity to partner with Churchill Downs for these educational opportunities.

Synopsis: "Hellsmouth, a willful thoroughbred filly, has the legacy of a family riding on her. The Forges: one of the oldest and proudest families in Kentucky; descended from the first settlers to brave the Wilderness Road; as mythic as the history of the South itself – and now, first-time horse breeders.

Through an act of naked ambition, Henry Forge is attempting to blaze this new path on the family's crop farm. His daughter, Henrietta, becomes his partner in the endeavor but has desires of her own. When Allmon Shaughnessy, an African American man fresh from prison, comes to work in the stables, the ugliness of the farm's history rears its head. Together through sheer will, the three stubbornly try to create a new future – one that isn't determined by Kentucky's bloody past – while they mold Hellsmouth into a champion."³⁶

³⁶Morgan, C. (2016, May). *The sport of Kings*. Goodreads. <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/28636686-the-sport-of-kings>

Year 5	S1 (Kentucky)	S2 (Diversity)	S3 (Audiences)	S4 (Visibility)	S5 (Education)
<i>Coal Miner's Daughter</i> play	X		X	X	X
Coalmining Today verbatim	X	X	X		X
Young Playwright's Festival	X	X		X	X
Red Dog Road (tour)	X		X		
KPW 10 Minute Festival	X	X			
Kentucky Christmas	X	X	X (tour)		X
<i>The Sport of Kings</i> pt. 1	X	X		X	X
<i>The Sport of Kings</i> pt. 2	X	X		X	X

15th Theatre: Internal Structure

The operational activities of a theatre company depend on human resources. As the company looks to expand its programming and impact on state communities, the organization will need to recruit and hire for certain positions, described below in the years in which the company plans to hire.

Year 1: Creating Working Supporters through a Board of Directors

As outlined in the development plan, the theatre company looks to attain 501(c)(3) nonprofit status. The creation of a nonprofit organization in Kentucky with 501(c)(3) status requires the existence of a board with at least three directors.³⁷ Because of this requirement, the theatre company will begin its internal structure with the creation of a board of directors. The inaugural board is essential in creating the creative environment and should reflect the mission of the company. To that end, the board needs to reflect the diversity of Kentucky, recruiting and creating relationships with professionals outside of the major population centers of Louisville and Lexington as well as people outside of the arts sector. As a new company, the 15th Theatre may rely on the board to contribute to fundraising as well as the duties outlined below:

- Provide the legal necessities of duty of care, loyalty, and obedience to ensure that assets and management are used effectively in support of the organization.³⁸
- Provide insight, amendments, and final approval to the company's strategic plan, including the development plan and annual budget, to create a cohesive understanding of the theatre's goals and trajectory.

³⁷*How to Start a Nonprofit Organization in Kentucky*. Harbor Compliance. (2024, February 15). <https://www.harborcompliance.com/how-to-start-a-non-profit-organization-in-kentucky>

³⁸*Board roles and Responsibilities*. National Council of Nonprofits. (2024). <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/running-nonprofit/governance-leadership/board-roles-and-responsibilities>

- Support the operational activities of the theatre company through their networking resources within the state, helping with the fundraising and board recruitment necessities. It is essential to advocate for the theatre company as an essential project for Kentucky, particularly in its first years of operation when the company must build its institutional visibility.
- Contribute to specific committees and initiatives, including fundraising initiatives.
- Attend board meetings and actively contribute to the approval of the annual budget, including the evaluation of the artistic director and their compensation package.

Producing Artistic Director

In its first few years, the theatre company's producing Artistic Director will work closely with the board to ensure the achievement of the company's mission. The artistic director sets the artistic vision of the company, particularly in choosing the programming of the organization. As a producing artistic director, the company's first Artistic Director will fulfill both artistic and administrative roles, performing the duties listed below:

- Direct at least a portion of the company's programming each year
- Implement and evaluate artistic programming across the season
- Recruit, hire, and supervise the artistic staff of individual productions, including directors, designers, performers, and stage managers
- Develop and foster relationships with Kentucky organizations; locally based corporations, other artistic organizations, cultural and historical agencies, and more, to create a network of relationships for future opportunities:
 - Found theatre spaces (i.e., Louisville Mega Caverns, Locust Grove, etc.)
 - Artistic partnerships

- Financial sponsorships
- Inclusion in verbatim plays and representative arts programming
- Report to the Board of Directors for updates on artistic and operational activity at regularly scheduled meetings (at least one per quarter), including the proposal of the annual budget for board approval

Year 2: Development of the Company

Entering the second season, the company will continue to rely on the Artistic Director and Board of Directors to perform the bulk of administrative functions. However, as the company expands its programming, it will be essential to have a strong financial Development Coordinator. This function will likely be fulfilled by a volunteer with the goal of raising adequate funds to equitably pay their salary in subsequent years, while also raising funds for the future roles outlined. The Development Coordinator works to drive contributed income for the organization through the duties listed below:

- Organize and monitor the development plan's fundraising efforts, including:
 - Grant proposals
 - Fundraising events
 - Individual or corporate giving proposals
- Steward relationships with current and potential donors through several types of communication
- Organize and monitor the database for contributed income
 - Donation tracking
 - Donor acknowledgement and gratitude communications

- Organize community engagement and group offers to widen reach and accessibility of the programming of the company
- Organize and train volunteers
- Organize social media and public relations opportunities to increase institutional visibility to potential donors

Year 3: Engaging with Educational Opportunities

The third season marks the implementation of the company's first large-scale educational offering, the Young Playwrights Festival. While school groups may have been engaged during the previous seasons, the success of the third year's educational goals necessitate the hiring of an Educational Director. This role may begin as a part-time position that will grow into a full-time position as the educational programming expands. The Educational Director will fulfill the following duties:

- Design and implement the annual Young Playwrights Festival, including the recruitment of mentors, editors, production volunteers
- Recruit students and young people for inclusion in the Young Playwrights Festival and subsequent youth programming
- Evaluate the educational needs of the community and the efficacy of past educational programming when developing new educational programming
- Develop summer educational programming that aligns with the mission of the theatre as a whole, with a focus on creating productions led by young people
- Organize school groups to attend season programming
- Organize students interested in inclusion in verbatim plays and/or representative programming

- Collaborate with the artistic director and development coordinator to create educational and promotional materials for season and educational programming
- Alert the artistic director and development coordinator to budgetary needs of educational programming and educational opportunities for partnerships, grants, etc.

Year 4/5: Expanding the Administration

As the company continues to expand, the administrative duties will increase. This will lead to the necessity of splitting the artistic and administrative duties into two positions: the Artistic Director and the Executive Director to create more equitable working conditions and allowing for more voices to be represented in the administration of the theatre. The Executive Director would fulfill the following duties:

- Collaborate with the Artistic Director, Educational Director, and the Development Director to develop and implement operational goals and activities, including the development of the annual budget
- Along with the Artistic Director, act as an advocate and steward of the organization to bolster support of the theatre
- Hire and supervise operational workers, outside of the production hiring responsibilities of the Artistic Director
- Manage databases and financial and organizational paperwork to ensure compliance with nonprofit legislation and audits
- Create relationships with Board members and connect with the networks established by the Artistic Director and development coordinator
- Manage public communications, including press releases, newsletters, social media, audience relations

15th Theatre Development Plan

Overview

The success of the theatre company's strategic plan is in part dependent on being listed as a non-profit, mission-driven organization. To this end, it is necessary to achieve 501(c)(3) status with the Internal Revenue Service. The status of non-profit provides the advantages of tax exemption on revenues, allowing money to be funneled back into the organization's programming, as well as making the organization eligible to a wider range of grant and donation opportunities. The following funding opportunities listed in this development plan are based on the organization as a 501(c)(3) focused on the arts and Kentucky heritage. Further, the opportunities listed are not a comprehensive look at funding opportunities, but rather a starting point for the financial development of the 15th Theatre.

Year One

In the first year of operating, as an unproven entity, the theatre company will need to prove itself to potential donors, particularly to foundations and giving organizations. Many grants are only eligible to organizations that have been established for three to five years. Because of these realities, the focus of the first year of development will be to raise money for individual projects, ensuring that the first season of programming has the resources to succeed and create a positive and substantial impact in terms of quality productions and audience reception. Outside of individual project grants and donations, the first year's development includes creating relationships with organizations that may provide unrestricted operating support in the future.

Kentucky Arts Council- Kentucky Arts Partnership (KAP) Grant Program

This grant has the goal of “developing and maintaining strong arts organizations” within the state to work towards year-long, statewide arts programming.³⁹ This is an excellent fit for the theatre company starting out, as many arts grants tend to be awarded to the maintenance of established arts organizations, rather than the development of new projects. Further, creating a relationship with the Kentucky Arts Council will benefit the company for several years as programming seeks to expand. Because of the work done on strategic planning, the theatre company fulfills these requirements listed for this grant:

- Applicants must provide a significant amount of year-round public arts-based activity and programming that impacts Kentuckians and their communities.
- Applicants must have a board approved long-range plan covering at least the current and next fiscal years.

This grant is flexible, going towards the general operating expenses of an arts organization, allowing the theatre company to use the allotted funds for development and production expenses. Therefore, this grant, if admitted, will go towards the expenses of the first productions.

EDA Grant- Kentucky Tourism

This grant for a variable amount of money is for the “funding for projects, which are in direct support of the promotion and marketing efforts of a tourism event, attraction or geographic area.”⁴⁰ The money of this grant will go towards the advertising expenses needed for the inaugural season. This grant supports the printing of and disbursement of brochures, the creation of billboards, and website support. The brochures and website would promote the entire season’s

³⁹*Kentucky Arts Partnership (KAP) grant program.* Kentucky Arts Council. (2024). <http://artscouncil.ky.gov/KAC/Creative/KAPguidelines.htm>

⁴⁰*EDA grant: Kentucky tourism - state of Kentucky - visit Kentucky, official site.* Kentucky Tourism. (2024a). <https://www.kentuckytourism.com/industry/programs/eda-grant>

programming, while the majority of billboard space would be used to promote the first production, *Medea* at the Mega Caverns, as this production greatly aligns with the goals of this grant, namely promoting a tourism attraction that is already connected with Kentucky Tourism: the Louisville Mega Caverns. Because the mission of the theatre is to uphold Kentucky experiences, it is essential that the theatre connects with the tourism and heritage opportunities of the state. Further, the visibility provided by Kentucky Tourism will greatly benefit the institution of the theatre.

Funding Specific to Programming

Medea

- This new adaptation will be presented at the Louisville Mega Caverns to broaden audience reach and start the theatre company's commitment to found production spaces. To fund this project, the company will look for grants focused on new work development and non-traditional theatre. Further opportunities may include utilizing the relationship with Kentucky Tourism, established through the EDA Grant, to negotiate a partnership with Louisville Mega Caverns. The company also has the opportunity to reach out to the Lights Under Louisville team for advice on how to fund and run an experience at the Mega Caverns.
- As *Medea* centers a female character and the theatre company has the opportunity to commission a female-identifying Kentucky-based playwright, funding opportunities may be considered from Women's Councils on local, state, and national levels.

Night, Mother and The Body

- These productions, both around ninety minutes with minimal set needs, will be the first touring productions of the theatre company. Because it will be a tour, the theatre company will focus on grants that center accessibility to the arts, particularly to underserved areas. Providing an award-winning work with a newer work will be used to entice individual donors and audience members to fund these productions.

Kentucky Christmas: Appalachian Storytelling

- Appalshop and Roadside Theatre: Because this production involves the engagement of Appalachian musicians, the theatre company could look to partner with Appalshop, a Kentucky-based arts organization centered on Appalachia that does work with film, music, radio, archiving, and partners with Roadside Theatre. Because their mission and previous work align with the programming goals of the winter offering, they may be able to provide assistance in finding musicians and in cost-sharing as a sponsor or partner of this production. Further, based on the funders listed on the Appalshop website, the theatre organization could look to Appalachia and Southern-based funding opportunities, including South Arts and the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, as well as arts grants from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.

Topdog/Underdog

- This play is written by an award winning playwright of color. This creates opportunities and responsibilities for the production. The theatre company has the opportunity to partner with Black-owned businesses, both for-profits and

nonprofits, across the state to help funding and create interest in potential audience members. The theatre company could reach out to local theatres including Kentucky Black Repertory to either create a partnership or solicit advice on who to reach out to for funding BIPOC productions.

Year Two

Entering the second year with more visibility as an organization allows the theatre more funding opportunities. The company now has a record of diversified types of theatre: found space productions, touring, and new and established works. Going forward we can use this record to reach out to potential donors and funding organizations.

Community Event Mini-Grants- Fund for the Arts

The mini-grant is given to organizations or individual artists to create short-term events that engage communities in the Louisville area.⁴¹ This would be of significant help in funding the first annual Kentucky Playwrights Workshop's Ten Minute Play Festival. This grant, ranging from \$500-\$5,000 (no more than 50% of the program's budget), will be used to fund the Kentucky Playwright Festival production expenses. As part of the stipulations of this grant, the theatre company would need to partner with another organization. In this case, this would be the Kentucky Playwrights Workshop. We could also look to partner with our chosen venue as part of the application for this grant. Further stipulations require the festival to be free to the public and produced in a greater Louisville area neighborhood. Funding from this grant would go towards production expenses, including compensation for directors, designers, and actors involved in the

⁴¹*Arts in neighborhoods community event mini-grants.* Fund for the Arts. (2024). <https://fundforthearts.org/funding/community-event-mini-grants/>

festival. By working with the Fund for the Arts on this small grant, we will be eligible for more significant funding opportunities in the future.

Humanities in Place- Mellon Foundation

The Mellon Foundation has an initiative that “support[s] projects and programs with a place-based focus that promote greater access, interaction, and exchange of stories and experiences toward a fuller appreciation and understanding of a wider variety of our histories, narratives, and expression.”⁴² This initiative aligns very well with our second season’s programming, specifically our productions of *Confederates* presented at Historic Locust Grove and the new work *Idlewild* presented aboard the Belle of Louisville. These productions allow for the dramatic representation of shared history, including the history of systematic racism, in these historic spaces. By presenting these productions outside of traditional theatre spaces, the theatre company is able to reach audiences who may generally feel disconnected from the performing arts, broadening our outreach to those who would benefit from telling and listening to these narratives. The Mellon Foundation’s funding would support the expenses of producing full theatrical productions in these spaces.

Mildred V. Horn Foundation

This foundation has several fields of interest, including education, the preservation of historic homes in Kentucky and surrounding states, and the performing arts.⁴³ Because of these interests, this would be a good foundation to seek support for our productions of *Confederates* at Historic Locust Grove, similar to the grant from the Mellon Foundation. The production of

⁴²*Humanities in Place Grant Program*. Mellon Foundation. (2024). <https://www.mellon.org/grant-programs/humanities-in-place>

⁴³ *The Mildred V. Horn Foundation (Kentucky)*. Grants Office. (2024). <https://www.healthitgrants.info/Grant-Details/gid/55157>

Confederates will increase foot traffic for Locust Grove, providing it opportunities to maintain its funding for preservation of its grounds. Further, *Confederates* presents educational opportunities for students to explore local history and contemporary issues of racism through the methodology of the performing arts. Grants from this foundation can range from \$5,000 to \$500,000 with several small grants given to nonprofits and projects for under \$5,000.

Year Three

The third year marks a significant increase in the amount of programming, leading to an increased need to earn contributed income from donors and funding organizations. As programming increases and continues to diversify its target audiences, there may be increased necessity to reach out to a diverse range of grants and donors. By the third year, the company has had the opportunity to grow relationships with foundations and local and statewide corporate sponsors to find the proper fits for the different types of programming. It is also the first year of the company's large-scale educational Young Playwrights Festival. This project opens up the necessity and opportunity to apply for education-based grants.

Gheens Foundation Grant

This foundation supports projects and non-profit organizations that “improve quality of life for the residents of Metropolitan Louisville.”⁴⁴ Past grantees include Kentucky Shakespeare, Kentucky Performing Arts, Fund for the Arts, and the Kentucky Opera. Given this history, it is likely that establishing a relationship with the Gheens Foundation and receiving a grant would be possible, particularly in funding projects based in the Louisville area and impacting young people. The focus of a grant from this foundation would then most likely be the Young

⁴⁴ *Grant process*. The Gheens Foundation. (2024a). <https://www.gheensfoundation.org/grant-process2.html>

Playwrights Festival or programming like Jockey Jim or the Kentucky Derby verbatim play, as this will include Louisville residents as integral participants in their conception and production.

Lift a Life Novak Foundation

This foundation, headquartered in Louisville, KY, has the institutional goal of student leadership development.⁴⁵ This goal aligns well with the first annual Young Playwrights Festival, as this part of our educational plan will provide students with the ability to work with arts professionals to see their stories produced. The funding provided by this organization must stay focused on educational programming, going towards the production expenses of the festival and the compensation to the artist mentors that will work with the student participants.

Brown Forman Corporation

The Brown Forman Corporation and Foundation have a long history of providing arts funding to organizations such as Actors Theatre of Louisville and Kentucky Shakespeare. Their main goals include enhancing arts and cultural living as well as empowering responsible and sustainable living.⁴⁶ The theatre company aligns itself with both of these goals, as it produces theatrical productions that center on Kentucky culture and will work to be a sustainable company utilizing the principles of the Theatre Green Book, an initiative to create more sustainable theatre organizations. In its first year, the theatre company will look to receive a grant from the Brown Forman Corporation for an amount of up to \$25,000 for unrestricted operating support to go towards production expenses.

⁴⁵*Our mission.* Lift a Life Novak Family Foundation. (2024). <https://www.liftalifefoundation.org/our-mission>

⁴⁶*Grant guidelines and criteria: Brown Forman.* Brown Forman. (2024). <https://www.brown-forman.com/grant-guidelines-and-criteria>

Year Four

The fourth year opens up a lot of opportunities to apply for larger foundation grants, as many grants require three or more years of operation. These larger funding opportunities can be from Kentucky-based organizations or more national grant opportunities. As these funding opportunities open up, the company is better able to plan for long term and wide-ranging programming, particularly outreach to voices to be included in verbatim plays.

Sustaining Impact Grant- Fund for the Arts

In order to receive general operating funding from the Fund for the Arts, an arts organization must have created programming for at least three consecutive years within the state and previously received other funding from the Fund.⁴⁷ Entering the fourth season and previously applying for a micro-grant, the theatre company would newly be eligible for this opportunity in its fourth season. A grant for general operating expenses will allow for salaries of workers, including the Development Coordinator, Educational Director, and institutional expenses.

Shubert Foundation General Operating Support

The Shubert Foundation provides general operating support to arts organizations across the United States. In order to apply for support, the organization must have an annual budget of \$150,000 and have a “record of developing and producing new work” and “demonstrated commitment to underserved audiences and/or underrepresented voices.”⁴⁸ By the fourth season, the theatre company will have produced over six new full productions and toured productions across the state, including to areas that are historically underserved. Several of these productions

⁴⁷*Sustaining impact grants*. Fund for the Arts. (2024b). <https://fundforthearts.org/about/funding-a-vibrant-community/sustaining-impact-grants/>

⁴⁸*Theatre Grants*. The Shubert Foundation. (2024). <https://www.shubertfoundation.org/theatre>

include the focus on lifting underrepresented voices like the artists of Appalachia. These programmatic choices align with the Shubert Foundation's goals, creating a compelling case for funding from this source.

Year Five

As the initial strategic and programmatic plans for the 15th Theatre end in the fifth year, the company must look to the future to best decide the funding opportunities that will best serve the next strategic and programmatic plan. This may include both national opportunities and a larger commitment to funding staying within Kentucky, connecting to more communities. The following opportunities show both possibilities.

Grants for Arts Projects- National Endowment for the Arts

As the theatre company has grown over the previous four seasons, the company has become eligible for larger, national grant opportunities, including from the National Endowment for the Arts. The National Endowment includes Grants for Arts projects for nonprofit arts organizations that have been operational for three years.⁴⁹ Grant amounts range from \$10,000 to \$100,000 and require the arts organization to have a matching amount of funding from non-federal sources. Larger grants will go toward the creation of long-term development of productions, including verbatim pieces that require a significant amount of state-wide community outreach.

Individual Donations

Within the previous four years of programming, the theatre company has had the opportunity to grow relationships within the state's various communities. By the fifth year, the

⁴⁹ *Grants for Arts Projects*. National Endowment for the Arts. (2024). <https://www.arts.gov/grants/grants-for-arts-projects>

company can turn towards asking for gifts through a donation campaign, through both an event and a year-long effort of the development department to target and steward donors. One major fundraising opportunity may occur during the Kentucky State Fair, as there will be ample foot traffic and the presentation of our Young Playwrights Festival, allowing potential donors to see an example of our educational programming and our connection to the state.

Educational Plan

The education of Kentucky youth is an integral part of the company's strategic plan and essential to achieving the mission of providing theatre to all of Kentucky. As a new company, the theatre will have to build its educational programming alongside its productions. As the educational offerings expand, the theatre company will work to ensure compliance with National Core Art Standards and that all educational personnel will be properly trained and gone through background checks to ensure the safety and quality of the educational programs.⁵⁰

Year 1:

In the first season of programming, the majority of focus will be on creating institutional availability, building an audience before building individual educational programs. However, the company will engage with youth and education in the first season through partnerships with other Kentucky-based arts organizations. For instance, the company could create a relationship with the Governor's Scholars Program and the Governor's School for the Arts to invite their summer groups to *Medea* in the Mega Caverns and to a "backstage" experience to grow visibility of the company for young people. Further, the company could create a partnership with Arts Angle Vantage, a Louisville-based nonprofit organization that provides arts access and journalism training to high school students, to review or cover stories coming from the productions in the first season.

The company will create supplementary materials for educators to enhance any production attended by school groups, including study guides, content that explores the production's relation to Kentucky history, and how the production was developed. While the Fall programming may be too mature for school audiences, the winter offering of Appalachian

⁵⁰ *Theatre at a Glance*. National Art Standard. (2014). <https://www.nationalartsstandards.org/>

storytelling would provide an excellent opportunity for school groups to learn about local and state history, particularly its music and cultural tradition.

Year 2:

The second season will benefit from an increase in institutional visibility, allowing it to create more long-lasting relationships with educational partnerships. As the company continues to produce found space theatre, including Locust Grove and the Belle of Louisville, the theatre can network with the educational groups who have created relationships with the administration of these locations. The second season's educational goal will therefore be to develop these relationships to increase the number of schools and educational groups attending programming. By doing so, the company is creating an environment that values students, building the culture that will allow the upcoming educational programs to thrive.

Year 3:

The third season marks the inaugural year of education-specific programming. To achieve this, the theatre will hire an Educational Director whose first major project will be the implementation of the Young Playwrights Festival, outlined in the Programmatic Plan. By providing resources to young people to write plays, particularly the inclusion of mentorship, participants will be able to learn about the writing and production process, explore their creativity, and see their work produced, teaching writing skills, collaboration, and boosting self-efficacy.

Outside of the Young Playwrights Festival, the theatre company will continue to provide supplementary educational resources for educational and school groups attending the show, as well as providing talk backs to enhance seasonal programming for students. The hiring of an

Educational Director will allow for the expansion of these offerings and opportunities, including the public arts project outlined in Strategic Item #5 of the Strategic Plan.

Year 4:

The Educational Director will continue to plan and develop supplementary activities for school groups attending seasonal programming. To achieve connections between the productions and educational offerings, the company will seek to include its students to participate in the creation of verbatim plays, adding their voices to the landscape of shows including *My Kentucky Home Old and New* and the coal-mining verbatim play. To teach the process of developing verbatim plays, the theatre will offer a workshop to high school aged students to create their own verbatim piece on a theme of their choosing, creating another opportunity for young people to actively be a part of the artistic makeup of Kentucky.

Outside of this new educational offering, the Educational Director will continue to lead the Young Playwrights Festival, recruit school groups, and build relationships with Kentucky-based educational groups.

Year 5:

By the fifth season, the company will work to have enough visibility and resources to provide another opportunity for young people to create their own work and to explore the process of found space theatre through an annual summer camp. This summer camp would be organized similarly to the Young Playwrights Festival in terms of age group. Each age group would be able to choose a topic and a found space to present their work, perhaps in public playgrounds, community centers, or another public place. The Educational Director would work to find mentors and teachers to facilitate the direction and devising of these shows with an emphasis on student empowerment. It will be necessary to have multiple locations to offer this

summer camp, including in underfunded areas of the state. As the first five years conclude, the theatre company will have strong programs like the Young Playwrights Festival, summer camps like the one outlined here, and the supplementary educational materials to continue achieving its mission of upholding the voices of all Kentuckians.

Reflection

At the outset of this process, I wanted to explore the field of arts administration by combining my business coursework with my passion and training in theatre. The beginning of this project began in the fall semester of 2022, during which I decided that I wanted to develop a theatre company to gain a better understanding of how business strategy and artistic vision intersect, conflict, or complement each other. However, at this time I did not have a clear idea as to what the mission or focal point of this hypothetical theatre company would be. I went back and forth with several ideas, ranging from immersive theatre to a company reminiscent of the French Grand Guignol, a horror vaudeville theatre company. Then, during my semester studying at the University of Roehampton in London, England, I became incredibly passionate about the work of the National Theatre, a government-supported theatre focused on reflecting and providing theatre access across the United Kingdom. The National Theatre focuses on presenting new works by British playwrights, reviving plays of relevance to Britain, and preserving and revitalizing the classics. Following this, I began to research other national theatres, including National Theatre Wales, a company that produces works in found spaces and touring groups, rather than in dedicated facilities. My interest in these theatres began the spark of the idea for the company outlined in this project.

I began to reflect on why the United States did not have an equivalent to the National Theatre. Outside of the short-lived Federal Theatre Project of the 1930s, the United States has not had a federally supported theatre program. However, as I reflected, I began to see why a United States national theatre may not work: the United States has almost five times the population of the United Kingdom, is almost forty times larger in land mass, and has many diverse subcultures throughout the country. No one theatre could come close to encompassing the entirety of the United States. However, a model similar to the National Theatre may work on

a smaller scale, specifically on a statewide scale. A state theatre would be able to focus its energy on capturing the voices of its population, recognizing its unique history and subcultures.

Going forward with the concept of a state theatre, it became easy for me to decide to focus on developing a Kentucky state theatre. As a resident of Kentucky throughout my life, I have oscillated between pride and disappointment in the systems and cultures alive in the state. Kentucky is a beautiful state that has the natural landscapes of Red River Gorge and is the birthplace of bluegrass music. However, it is also ranked incredibly low in terms of public education and is the state where police murdered Breonna Taylor. Recognizing the multiple and complex truths of the state, I saw the importance of both celebrating and examining the history and contemporary realities of being a Kentucky resident. The productions focusing on Derby are particularly strong examples of this: the Derby brings in a lot of economic and media benefit to the state and involves family-friendly traditions like Thunder Over Louisville, but it also displays the wealth disparity present in the state and increases human trafficking surrounding Churchill Downs, among other issues. My experience in developing the programmatic plan has allowed me to examine my own perceptions of the subcultures, systems, and traditions of Kentucky. This examination occurred through researching state history, including the racism present in the history of state landmarks like Locust Grove and the Belle of Louisville, and discovering Kentucky playwrights, including the award-winning Marsha Norman and Suzan Lori-Parks and playwrights yet to be widely produced. This process has allowed me a more comprehensive understanding and appreciation of where I come from and how I can be a part of the state's narrative.

Academic and Professional Growth

As I have developed this project, I have worked to combine my majors of study, Theatre and Business Administration to reflect the realities of professional theatre. Professional theatre in the U.S. is both art and business. Theatre represents humankind and their stories to entertain, educate, and foster empathy and creativity. However, theatrical productions do not come into existence in a vacuum; they require budgeting, marketing, management, and business principles to be produced. Theatre companies, even non-profit theatre organizations, are service-based businesses that plan and produce theatrical arts, as well as maintain facilities, operations, and finances. Therefore, finding a balance between artistic creation and values must align with key business concepts of management to exist in the United States. This project has shown me how these principles work in a non-profit endeavor, particularly in creating art that is both relevant and engaging and finding multiple avenues of support, including community partnerships and grants.

Throughout this process, I have been able to utilize this new understanding of non-profit theatre in my own academic and professional growth. For instance, I created an example of a promotional version of the strategic and promotional plan to quickly provide a summary of this project, found [here and at the QR code below](#). This was predominantly of use at the Southeastern Regional Theatre Conference, a gathering of academic and professional theatre artists. Creating these materials showed me the importance of marketing, design, and communications professionals and how so many different types of expertise are vital to the creation of a 21st century artistic company. Further, it provided me with a method of reviewing how dynamic, personal, or incomplete aspects of my vision were, allowing me to self-edit as I went along.



Attending the Southeastern Theatre Conference also provided me with different perspectives on different areas of creating theatre. For instance, I was able to interact with many different playwrights, discussing the process of writing and workshopping new works. These discussions were enlightening, as many of the productions I have proposed in the programmatic plan would be commissioned new works. I discussed using newspaper articles as a starting point of a playscript with Pace University professor and produced playwright Sheri Wilner. I was also able to discuss the contemporary issues of content warnings of staging trauma onstage, a relevant topic when creating new works that deal with historical racism, grief, and the full range of human experience. These discussions have informed me and reestablished my respect and admiration for the amount of expertise, dedication, and time that goes into developing theatre productions.

Moving forward

Upon completing the original contribution of this project, I am aware of several ways to improve and expand on the concepts explored. For instance, if taken into a practical endeavor, it would be imperative to include diverse voices in the development of the strategic and programmatic plan to represent the state more accurately and inclusively. As a single perspective and voice, even one that researched the state, the current strategic and programmatic plan is limited. For instance, because the programming was based on my own personal experiences and

preferences, a lot of the productions are based in and around the Louisville area. Improvements can be made to more smoothly center and integrate statewide communities by bringing in artists from locations around the state. By including more voices, most likely on the inaugural board of the organization, the theatre would increase its chances for community partnerships with diverse groups, particularly groups outside of Louisville.

Reflecting on the possibility of bringing this concept for a theatre into reality, I see the necessity of going on a listening tour of stakeholders across the state. Listening tours are fairly common for managers in businesses and theatres to discuss the future of an organization. For this theatre, it would be helpful to discuss realities of producing in Kentucky with other arts organizations, including larger companies like Actors Theatre of Louisville and the Kentucky Opera, as well as small professional companies like ShPIeL Performing Identity or Mind's Eye Theatre Company. It would also be necessary to have discussions with the management of tourist attractions and heritage locations to develop a relationship with Kentucky residents and tourists through multiple avenues prior to programming. Most importantly, it is imperative to engage with Kentucky residents that include those personally invested in the arts, marginal theatre ticket buyers, and those who have historically not had access to theatre. Doing this work will go a long way to accomplishing the mission of creating a state theatre- including and representing all those in the state.

On a wider scope, the concept of a state theatre can be applied to any other state in the nation. This provides a wealth of opportunity for this project to go further, with other theatre professionals discovering their own perspective on the state they live in and how to develop a theatre that reflects their state- both its unique victories and its issues. If applied even further, this

project could be the first step into a network of state theatres, expanding and diversifying the concept of a possible American national theatre system.

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