



AMERICAN  
THEATRE  
WING

Founder of the Tony Awards®

# Audience Engagement through New Media

A Proposal to the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation  
Fund for National Projects

4/25/2014  
American Theatre Wing

## I.A. Funding Request

### The Project

New media, which is interactive digital content that can be consumed anytime, anywhere, on any digital device, has become essential to audience engagement. The American Theatre Wing has embarked upon an initiative that will help the national theatre community use new media to engage audiences. We are launching a digital hub for theatre and facilitating participation from theatre companies across the country. The goal is to create a new media destination where the entire theatre community can foster audience engagement on a deep, interactive level using video, sound, the written word, social media, and more. It will give theatre companies of all sizes the opportunity to engage national audiences in an interactive conversation about their artistic work, promoting the value of theatre to ever broader audiences.

With the help of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, we would like to share our technological investment and our media expertise with the theatre community at large. This initiative will build audience engagement and help the theatre community adopt new media. The projected cost of the initiative for the grant period is \$483,375 for year 1 and \$495,825 for year 2. We respectfully request support from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation in the amount of \$200,000 over two years, to help launch and pilot this initiative, build participation from the theatre community, engage audiences, and expand self-produced and contributed new media content. Our extensive existing media content, our relationships within the theatre community, and the expertise of our staff and leadership will come together to help us reach our goals.

### The Need

The National Endowment for the Arts' 2012 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts shows that live theatre audiences are decreasing (17), while 71% of adult Americans now engage with and consume the arts through electronic media (29). The NEA's 2010 report, "Audience 2.0: How Technology Influences Arts Participation," reveals that people who watch a performance online or on TV are twice as likely to attend a live show (89). Now that the media paradigm has shifted from TV to internet to mobile, cultural consumers expect to be offered new media, which includes interaction, creative participation, and social networking. At this moment, theatre has an important opportunity to extend the audience-artist conversation and build audiences by engaging them online, particularly on mobile devices, with interactive media and quality video content.

This past year, Adobe released industry data that reflected a 300% increase in mobile video consumption (1). The data also revealed that video content on social media gets twice the engagement as non-video content. Digital video consumption is growing and consumers increasingly expect to access video anytime and anywhere. Case studies show several theatre companies, such as Woolly Mammoth Theater Company and The Wooster Group, have increased audience engagement and ticket sales through use of digital media and social networking. However, much of the theatre community is lagging behind in offering digital content to audiences. The theatre community needs a catalyst to propel them into the new media landscape.

## The Web Platform

Together with the digital communications firm Athletics, we have built a website for this initiative which will launch in May 2014. The site is completely flexible, automatically adjusting for use with any digital device. Central to the website will be the premium video content stream highlighting videos produced by the American Theatre Wing and by theatre artists and companies across the country. Each video will be tagged with key words that make it searchable and generate “you may also be interested in” recommendations to maximize the quality of engagement and the time spent on the site. Additionally, each video will be accompanied by related links guiding the visitor to more information. For example, a video short about David Henry Hwang’s *M. Butterfly* would link to a review of the original production, a synopsis of the plot, and a search engine showing where in the country *M. Butterfly* is being performed this season. These features will invite visitors to become absorbed in learning and conversing about theatre, while making them aware of live theatre that is accessible to them in their community.

## The Content

Our premium video content stream will include produced, repurposed, and contributed video shorts that document the people, process, work, and diversity of American theatre, unified by a single editorial point of view. All of our content will be educational and entertaining, and timely yet historically significant over the long term.

- **Produced content** will include our new “Working in the Theatre” episodes, which are shot on-location by award-winning documentary filmmaker Margarita Jimeno. We currently have seven of these new episodes awaiting release and one more in post-production. A “sizzle reel” and a sampling of these new episodes are included in our supporting materials.
- **Repurposed content** will include “gems” of video mined from our 1,000 hours of original archived programming. These pieces will be selected for their relevance to current events in theatre, and repackaged in short segments for today’s digital media consumer. For example, if Young Jean Lee is premiering a new play, we will mine our archive and package brief excerpts of her speaking on her influences, experiences, or process as a playwright. Then we will feature these shorts on our interactive site and cross-promote them with the producing theatre company on social media.
- **Contributed content** from theatre-makers across the country will be selected for accession into our archive. This content will broaden the archive’s scope and reflect the diversity of theatre across the nation. The Wing will seek out high-quality content that documents unique and significant work. The Wooster Group’s “Dailies” are an example of the type of videos we will seek to include. In some cases we will subsidize editing/ post-production services from our freelance editors to assist the contributing company in telling their story.

## Unique In the Field

There is no resource like the one we are building. Theatre news websites such as Playbill, TheaterMania, Broadway.com, and Broadway World have video content, but that content is pushed by press representatives and largely aimed at driving ticket sales for Broadway shows. There is nothing wrong with marketing in this way, but it usually falls short of being educational, and certainly is not representative of the field as a whole. PBS’ “Great Performances” documents

performances, and the New York Times' "In Performance" series features short performances outside of the context of a production, but neither goes deeper to explore the process of creating the performance. HERE Arts Center's series, "Made Here," funded by Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, gives insight into the lives of artists in New York City. It is an excellent series, but it is very specific and we propose an educational media hub that is broader in scope to serve the national community. We will be inviting HERE to participate in this project.

## The Participants

We are building a core group of participants to be our contributors. Having performed an online landscape survey of theatre companies that produce online video content, we have begun approaching those who we believe are ready to contribute quality video content that fulfills the goals of the initiative and illuminates the people, process, and/or work of their theatre in a way that is educational, accessible, and relevant. We have already started working with four companies, and have received confirmation of commitment from five more. We are preparing to approach and/or awaiting responses from a number of additional participants for the pilot phase of the project. To make sure our contributed content reflects the geographical and cultural diversity of American theatre, we have included some past Regional Theatre Tony® Recipients and National Theatre Company Grants Recipients, who we have already vetted and identified as innovators and leaders in their local cultural communities. A list of participants and an explanation of our past relationship with them is attached. This list will continue to grow as the project progresses.

Additionally, since we submitted our letter of intent for this initiative, we have met with a group of curators from the Smithsonian National Museum of American History. These curators, from the museum's Division of Culture and the Arts, are interested in how our archival media can help provide context for their visitors, both in the museum and online. They are interested in partnering with us to share video content and artifacts, and to cross-promote with our respective audiences.

## Populations Served

In addition to our participants, the entire theatre community will benefit from this project. Theatre companies and artists will have a new model for communicating with audiences using new media, audiences will become more engaged by gaining insight into the artistic process and becoming more aware of live theatre within their geographic and financial reach, students and teachers will have new relevant resources for learning, and the field as a whole will gain insight into the current innovations and best practices of other practitioners. It is worth noting that the Wing makes a very conscious effort to showcase guests, select mentors, and engage participants who represent diversity by age, gender, race/ethnicity, economic status, geographic location, and sexual orientation. We believe it is essential that young people in particular see diversity represented, reinforcing the belief that there are places for them in the theatre community. The American Theatre Wing will produce a report on this project at the end of the grant period. The report will offer insights into ways that arts organizations of all sizes and capacities can engage audiences through new media. It will be promoted on our website and social media, and shared with our participants, our entire network of cultural industry and academic contacts, and our National Theatre Company Grant winners; past, present, and future.

## Key Staff

**Heather A. Hitchens** (Executive Director) is primarily responsible for all of the Wing's programs. She is a nationally recognized arts leader, with nearly 20 years of performing arts administration, policy, and program development experience. Prior to joining the American Theatre Wing in July of 2011, Hitchens served as the Executive Director of the New York State Council on the Arts, and earlier, as President of Meet The Composer, and as CEO of the Delaware Symphony Orchestra. Hitchens holds an M.S. in Arts Administration from Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA.

**Joanna Sheehan Bell** (Director of Programs) manages the Wing's granting, education, and media programming. She has been working at the Wing in progressively responsible positions since 2007. She is a 2008 graduate of Columbia University's Master's Program in Arts Administration and Arts Management. She received a 2007-2008 Arts and Humanities Research Fellowship from the University for her work in the field, and was Vice President of Student Advocates for the Arts.

**Kenny Gallo** (Director of Digital Media & Technology) manages the Wing's online platforms and social media channels, including the Wing's archived and repurposed media programs and their presence online. He joined the Wing staff in November 2011. Previously, he was the Web Manager at the League of American Orchestras, Communications Manager at Meet The Composer, and Gameday Producer at Major League Baseball's mlb.com.

## Consultants

**Athletics** (Digital Communications Firm) are providing the initial digital brand strategy and website development services for this initiative. Founded in 2004, Athletics' core capabilities encompass branding, graphic design, web design and development, mobile, strategy, art direction, motion graphics and data visualization. Clients include Creative Time, Vanity Fair, New York Magazine, MTV, Nike, Young & Rubicam, Forbes, and many more. Athleticsnyc.com

**Margarita Jimeno** (Video Producer) is the filmmaker and artist who is the new producer of "Working in the Theatre." In 2008 her feature music documentary film, *Gogol Bordello Non-Stop* debuted at the Göteborg Film Festival and won several awards during its festival run. Jimeno is an alumna of The School Of Visual Arts, Werner Herzog's Rogue Film School in Los Angeles, and the Berlinale Talent campus. Born in Bogotá, Colombia, she moved to New York City in 1997.

Around January of 2016, a consultant will be hired to perform an external evaluation and produce a report for the project, including lessons learned and case studies, that can be shared with the field at large. We will search for the appropriate consultant based on our past experience and based on recommendations from our colleagues in the field.

## Project Timeline with Benchmarks

### Phase One: Launch and Piloting

- Platform infrastructure built and content streams established by April 2014
- Launch new site in May 2014 and begin highlighting contributed content by August 2014
- Active development of new and repurposed original content continues (ongoing, indefinitely)
- Expand viewership through platforms such as Instagram, Pinterest, and Tumblr, in addition to Facebook and Twitter, by October 2014

- Cross-promote with all existing participants by December 2014
- Secure major corporate sponsor by April 2015

### **Phase Two: Promotion, Engagement, and Expansion**

- Build a group of at least 20 active participant organizations by August 2015
- Engagement: Facebook fan base at min. 50,000 likes, Twitter followers at min. 50,000, at least triple current share/ re-tweet rates, and achieve 2M total YouTube views by September 2015
- Begin collecting data from participating theatre companies/producers in November 2015
- Achieve measurable above-average increases in audiences/ audience engagement for participants and featured companies/productions by July 2015
- Produce and disseminate report on project and outcomes by September 2016

This project is an expansion of the Wing's ongoing media programming, and we will carry on activities beyond the grant period. We will continuously update the new media hub; creating and repurposing content, and also continuing the accession of content from established and new participants. Increased engagement on the site and on social media will result in increased interest on the part of potential sponsors and funders, building sustainability over time.

### **Our Work Thus Far**

We have been working with Athletics since September 2013, creating the new site and understanding its technical possibilities, planning the most effective ways to manage content, and refining our messaging and digital brand. Athletics is completing the website infrastructure now, and populating it with our initial content. During this process, we have evaluated our digital communications practices in light of current best practices and trends. Considering our massive video archive and exciting new video content, we looked closely at current trends in mobile video consumption. Video increases engagement, and the shorter the content, the greater the engagement. Seeing the proof of this has increased our focus on creating short "teaser" videos for our educational media programming and promoting them on social media.

Furthermore, now that we will have a dynamic website with a content management system and a robust contributor network, we can publish new content daily. We are developing a content management plan for daily posting which will follow our cultural calendar, respond to our digital audience, and solidify our editorial perspective. Over the past year, the Wing laid the foundation for this project by digitizing all of its available past media content, and uploading it to YouTube with keywords. This wealth of nearly one thousand hours of content underpins the project.

In addition, we have been producing the new "Working in the Theatre" programming with Margarita Jimeno since June 2013. She and her crew, under the guidance of Joanna Sheehan Bell and Heather Hitchens, have produced eight episodes in a new documentary format. From this process, we have already learned that shooting outside the studio with a skilled crew results in more artistic, engaging content for approximately the same cost as shooting in the studio. What is more, we realized that theatre companies across the country can produce similarly engaging video shorts, albeit with lower production values, at any budget. It is our hope that this project will encourage them to begin engaging their audiences by telling their stories through video shorts.

## I.B. Evaluation

### How We Define Success

At a fundamental level, this project should catalyze the national theatre community to make the shift to communicating with audiences using new media and to begin engaging audiences on their computers and mobile devices in a more thoughtful and comprehensive way. We posit that engagement on our media hub, especially with videos that feature artists talking about their work and process, will build engagement in theatre audiences by helping them experience what Alan Brown and Rebecca Ratzkin, in “Making Sense of Audience Engagement,” call “the moment of curatorial insight” (16). When an audience member gains insight into a playwright’s inspiration, or a director’s, actor’s or designer’s interpretation, Brown and Ratzkin claim, it transforms that audience members’ experience of the art and greatly increases engagement and impact.

Audience engagement in the arts can be difficult to define and quantify. For this project, we want to use metrics that all participants can track within their current internal capacities for evaluation. Fortunately, today there are web and social media analytics tools available online that are free and easy to use. In addition, we will gather ticket and subscription sale information from our participants. We are assuming that increases in audience engagement lead to an increase in ticket sales, and in particular repeat ticket sales and subscriptions. This assumption is based on existing studies in audience engagement, such as the aforementioned Wooster Group and Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company case studies, as well as case studies presented in the Boston Foundation’s “The Art of Participation: Shared Lessons in Audience Engagement.”

### Short-Term Outcomes: By the end of the grant period

#### Project Participants (Organizations Contributing Content)

- 80% of project participants will enrich their new media practices, including but not limited to the continued use of short videos to engage audiences online (*measured through surveys and interviews with project participants*).
- 80% of project participants will experience an increase in audience engagement (*measured by an increase in online engagement as evidenced by various web and social media analytics, and measured by an increase in ticket sales and/or subscriptions, and an increase in repeat visitors, subscription renewal rates, and subscriber conversion rates for project participants*).

#### Other Theatre Companies and Artists

- 70% of surveyed theatre companies and artists who access the media will gain a better understanding of what is happening in the field (*measured via user feedback and surveys*).
- 70% of surveyed theatre companies and artists who use the site will be inspired to better use new media to broaden and engage audiences (*measured via user feedback and surveys*).

#### Audience Members

- We will see evidence that audience members who view videos on the site will gain “curatorial insight” and become more engaged theatre-goers (*measured by online comments and an increase in online engagement and project participant ticket and subscription sales*).

- 30% of audience members who use the site will learn about opportunities to see theatre locally (*measured by click-through on featured links such as TCG's "This Month Onstage" or the About the Artists' "Now Playing" database*).

### **Students and Teachers**

- 80% of students and teachers surveyed will gain insight into current artists and productions in professional theatre (*measured by user feedback and by interviews with our contacts in our national college drama department database*).

### **The American Theatre Wing**

- We will gain a better understanding of our constituents' interests (*measured by staff interviews, user feedback, and online engagement metrics*).
- We will gain new constituents and strengthen relationships with constituents (*measured by online reach and engagement metrics*).
- We will diversify our constituency (*measured by a survey of users*).

### **Long-Term Outcomes: Beyond the grant period (in 3-5 years)**

As new users and participants continue to join the project beyond the grant period, the short-term outcomes listed above will continue. Meanwhile, we expect to measure several additional impacts over the long term.

### **Project Participants (Organizations Contributing Content)**

- 80% of past project participants will report that the project has had a positive and lasting impact on their approach to communicating with audiences (*measured by follow-up surveys and interviews*).

### **Other Theatre Companies and Artists**

- Of those who accessed the report, 60% will report that it has had an impact on how they use online/social media to communicate with and engage audiences (*measured by follow-up surveys and interviews*).

### **The American Theatre Wing**

- Our partnership with the Smithsonian Institution will continue to grow. When the History Museum's new wing for arts and culture opens in 2017, we will be a key partner, providing video pieces that give context to their online and in-person visitors, holding joint events, and broadening the reach of our archive through cross-promotion.

### **Disseminating and Sustaining Results**

The project will undergo ongoing formative evaluation, using participant feedback and progress towards benchmarks to make any necessary course corrections. Additionally, there will be a summative evaluation at the end of the grant period. The evaluation, performed with the help of a consulting external evaluator, will result in a written report that will be available free of charge on the website. We will also promote the report via email to our constituents, including our database of 13,000 theatre companies and industry contacts, and 9,000 college drama professors. As described above, results will be sustained as the site, media content, and social media continue to receive new users, and as the Wing continues to invite new participants to join the project.



## I.C. Background

### **History, Mission, and Governance**

The American Theatre Wing is a not-for-profit organization that serves and supports the theatre by celebrating excellence and nurturing the next generation: on stage, behind the scenes, and in the audience. We pursue this mission with a range of programs that foster dialogue and document and disseminate best practices in theatre, celebrate theatrical excellence, provide support and professional development to emerging artists, and build and engage audiences.

In 1917 the New York theatre community came together to assist the war effort, and the American Theatre Wing was born. Our programs have evolved over the years to meet the changing needs of the theatre community and the nation. Current programs include professional development programs for the next generation of theatre professionals (SpringboardNYC and Theatre Intern Network), grants for emerging artists and theatre companies (Jonathan Larson Grants and the National Theatre Company Grants), and educational media programming for theatre practitioners, teachers, students, and audiences (“Working in the Theatre” and our media archive). A detailed description of these programs can be found in the attached supplementary materials.

The Wing is governed by a Board of Trustees, which currently has 26 members including officers. Our Board meets quarterly, with additional meetings for committees and sub-committees. We also have a non-governing Advisory Board of 57 members, many of whom serve on committees in an advisory capacity. Our Trustees and Advisory Committee members are leading artists and executives from the theatre and entertainment industries, as well as top professionals from journalism and broadcasting, law, finance, and other fields. Under the leadership of Executive Director Heather A. Hitchens, the Wing has entered a new era of revitalization and growth.

### **The Project, our Mission, and our Constituents**

This project supports our mission by celebrating the most innovative and excellent artists and work in theatre today, while nurturing the next generation of audience members by engaging them through new media. It supports our ongoing commitment to supporting the national theatre community by stimulating innovation and best practices and promoting the benefits of theatre to a broad and diverse audience and patron base. It also serves our participants on this project, as well as other theatre companies and practitioners who will gain from the project’s learnings and follow our examples to learn how the theatre industry can use new media to engage audiences.

We are planning this project with an eye to sustainability. The content management plan for the media hub is being designed with our current staff’s capacity in mind. The Wing has eight full-time staff, most of whom are engaged in this project in one way or another, and a part-time intern who has been brought in specifically to assist with this project. Margarita Jimeno, our part-time consulting video producer, works with a team of freelance cinematographers, crew, and editors to produce the new content. Our program alumni serve as a volunteer pool, and we engage over 80 volunteers per year, in addition to our Trustees and Advisory Committee. We have the capacity to execute the project fully with our current personnel. As the project becomes more established, we

believe corporate sponsors will help us continue the project beyond the grant period. However, after its launch the project will be scalable to accommodate any funding uncertainties.

As mentioned in the funding request, we did an informal survey of online video content produced by theatre companies, and identified a list of companies that we feel are ready to participate productively in this initiative. We prioritized some companies outside of New York, including some past National Theatre Company Grant recipients and Regional Tony winners, to better represent our nation's theatre community. We have received confirmation of interest and/or started working with nine of these participants (see attached letters of support indicating firm commitment), and have reached out to nine more. Additionally, as previously noted, we have met with curators from the Smithsonian Institution who are interested in working with us to share video content that provides historical context about American theatre for our respective audiences.

### Our Core Competencies

The American Theatre Wing has developed the best-known platform for the recognition of theatrical achievement on Broadway with The Tony Awards, our \$10 million joint venture with the Broadway League. In 2013, together with the Broadway League, we created and implemented a new digital strategy for the Tony Awards, with the goal of increasing viewership. The plan was implemented on the Tony Awards website, across social media platforms, via a mobile/tablet app with a "second screen" experience, with shared content from participants, special video series, blogger outreach, and more. These efforts were leveraged through digital marketing collaboration and reciprocal promotion with all stakeholders. As a result of this digital strategy, the Tony Awards received a 23% ratings increase—a remarkable result in this time of fractured media consumption. We believe this model can be successfully applied to promote theatre in general, with a similar outcome for audience engagement.

For over thirty years, the American Theatre Wing's media programs have documented the visions and processes of the greatest theatrical artists of our time and given the public unique insight into how theatre is made and produced. With nearly 1,000 hours of original programming, our media archive is the most comprehensive online media library documenting the history and legacy of American theatre. It is used not only by the national theatre community, but also by students, teachers, audience members, and the general public. This vast source of content will help us create and feature timely video shorts that highlight what is happening in the theatre community.

### Conclusion

As new media becomes increasingly important for audience engagement, we hope the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation will help us pilot, promote, and expand an interactive digital media hub that gives the theatre community a national platform to discuss their artistic work, deepen engagement and promote the value of theatre to broader audiences than ever before. Our experience in implementing a successful new media strategy for the 2013 Tony Awards, our extensive existing media archive, our position within the theatre community, and the expertise of our staff and leadership will all contribute to ensuring that this initiative succeeds.

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