

Applicant (GMS): William Inge Festival Foundation, Independence, KS

Project: Independence Summer Festival of Theatre and Art

PROJECT NARRATIVE SECTION:

A. Budget.

The request is for \$150,000.00. The William Inge Center for the Arts (WICA)— associated with Independence Community College (ICC)— has the capacity to undertake this project. For 31 years, it has produced the William Inge Theatre Festival, the Official Theatre Festival of the State of Kansas. ICC is committing substantial in-kind and cash resources; the local public school district is as well. The community at large is volunteer-oriented: more than 100 community members aid the running of the William Inge Theatre Festival. We anticipate similar numbers to aid the smooth operation of the project.

B. Major Project Activities

"Innovative arts programming that foster community interaction" best describes this project. The first annual Independence Summer Festival of Theatre and Art's overall vision is to transform Independence's schools, streets, retail spaces, museums, libraries and other public spaces into a thriving celebration of human spirit. The action plan is to present performances, arts workshops, exhibits, concerts, and gallery displays, in both traditional and non-traditional spaces, private businesses, and public areas; while also providing first class performers, artists, writers and musicians to share their expertise through performance and instruction. The educational component is aided by public workshops, teacher training courses, seminars, and interactive audience talkbacks with the professional artists. The Festival's centerpiece will be a rotating

four-show repertory of plays. All will take place in a four-week period in the summer of 2014; planning for the project, however, will begin in Fall 2012.

The place-making strategies include: 1) commitment to place and character: William Inge is a native son, whose most acclaimed work centers on the aspirations of authentic characters in small Midwestern towns grappling with a rapidly changing world. This project emphasizes a distinctive "small town or rural" aesthetic, through selection of top-quality Midwestern-focused artists and material; featuring music, visual art, poetry, literature, and a repertory of plays by William Inge and other writers who reflect this aesthetic. 2) Convince business and public leaders of its value: the project has already received enthusiastic endorsement from many downtown businesses (and the Main Street, Inc., organization and the Independence Chamber of Commerce); the primary economic and industrial development group (Montgomery County Action Council); and the City of Independence. The Independence Community College and Independence Unified School District 446 are also committed partners. 3) Mobilize public will: The project will partner with prominent local cultural groups, whose membership participants will be a catalyst toward even wider support for the project. These include: the Independence Historical Museum and Arts Center, the Independence Public Library, the Booth Theatre Foundation, and the William Inge Theatre Festival Steering Committee.

The projected performance sites utilize our partners' spaces: a former post office that is now a museum and arts center; a nationally recognized library with several purpose-built presentation areas; the restored lobby of a classic 1927 theater; and several downtown retail establishments. Traditional performance spaces include fully equipped theaters at the local community college and high school. Theater artists will be selected by the Inge Center Artistic Director through submissions, previously established professional networks and auditions. Musical artists will be selected by the respective arts discipline coordinator, through auditions, and in consultation with musical artists and bookers of the region. Visual artists will be selected through a juried selection

committee as well as efforts by the arts discipline coordinator, working with regional artists and art galleries. Literary events (poetry & prose readings and workshops) will be handled by the literary discipline coordinator, through contacts with regional artists, references, and submitted material.

C. Outcome and measurements.

The project strengthens the community socially by enticing residents to come together at familiar, informal locales to experience the creative intersection of multiple arts disciplines, and accompanying educational discussions and seminars. It strengthens the community economically, not only by direct attendance, but also by further "branding" the region as a known center for culture. The evaluation tools discussed in (h) will provide evidence toward attaining NEA outcomes. As the first of what is hoped will be many years of annual Summer Festivals, we hope to create a patron base to build on for future years.

D. Schedule.

The public portion of the project will take place during a four-week period in July and August 2014. Key benchmarks include: identify, schedule, and select primary artists and productions, and begin marketing of four-play repertory, September/October, 2012. Hire arts discipline coordinators January 2013, to start identifying talent and planning venues. Publicize juried events by summer 2013, and finish selection process by December 2013. Have production team and performers in place by March of 2014, begin rehearsals in late May or early June of 2014.

E. Partners, key organizations, individuals, and works of art.

The two primary partners are the William Inge Festival Foundation (WIFF) (arts designee) and the City of

Independence. WIFF provides artistic leadership; city officials will provide aid in logistic, marketing, security and parking issues, and with its imprimatur of the project. The following key organizations are committed and will contribute these responsibilities and resources: *Independence Community College*, Inge Center Staff support, housing for 20+ artists, meal stipends, and use of theater/scene shop/back stage areas, plus office space, insurance, security, phone, and utilities and many other support services; *Independence Unified School District 446*: use of auditorium and scene shop/back stage areas, along with security, utilities, insurance, and many other support services; *Independence Museum and Arts Center*: gallery space and workshop spaces, security, insurance, utilities; *Independence Public Library*: performance and lecture spaces, with security, insurance, and utilities. A number of retail establishments have offered to host art, music and literary events. For example, the Independence Pharmacy and Soda Fountain is a cherished local establishment, and the project envisions commissioning a professional writer to create a site specific performance piece for the space. Peter Ellenstein, artistic director of the William Inge Center for the Arts, is the sole identified individual to date, who will lead the overall project. Additional artists will be selected after extensive regional and national searches. We will seek the following qualifications for the following key artists: arts discipline coordinators will need to have extensive experience in their discipline, with verifiable professional and/or academic experience organizing events in their field. For example, theater directors would be members of Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers or possess equivalent professional experience. The works of art to be presented include: four plays in repertory. The productions will be selected to emphasize the distinctive nature of the community, its literary history and its interaction with the wider world. Independence is hometown to William Inge, America's foremost writer of small-town America. The William Inge Center for the Arts is one of the leading new play development centers in America. Therefore, the repertory will include works that are evocative of small-town America, both past and present, and will include a William Inge play, a theme-appropriate popular play (or musical) from the modern canon, and two world

premiere plays by contemporary playwrights addressing the Festival's theme. The project will also highlight the talents of regional visual artists, musicians, and writers, again emphasizing rural America today.

F. Target community

There are two primary targets: out-of-town visitors and local residents, primarily from Montgomery County and four adjoining counties. Out-of-town visitors will be engaged through macro-promotional events (see (g)). The local population, of which Montgomery is the most populous county in the region (35,000), struggles economically. Of 105 Kansas counties, Montgomery has the 3rd highest unemployment rate. The counties adjoining are in similar straits: Wilson ranks 2nd highest in joblessness, with Labette at 4th, Chautauqua at 12th, and Elk at 19th. (Kansas Department of Labor, Dec. 2011 figures.)

The local audience will be engaged through the lead of active local cultural organizations, which will be part of the planning. The Inge Center has engaged the local audience before, primarily through soliciting participation from prominent cultural and civic groups, who then activate their membership. Project leaders will target customers for educational lectures, seminars and classes by working with area school districts; the Inge Center has a long history of collaboration with numerous area school districts in attracting participants for youth and adult activities. We will reach underserved audiences through cooperation with partners in the local public school district and public library. We are estimating that events will have attendance of 10-20,000 over the four weeks.

G. Plans for promoting and publicizing.

The tactics we will use to reach out-of-town audiences include soliciting bus tours, plus social and traditional advertising and public relations. The Kansas Department of Tourism officials will aid project leaders to identify bus tour conventions to attend and promote the project. We anticipate that for its

first year, media outlets in the closest major cities of Kansas City, Wichita, Tulsa, and Joplin will provide much news coverage. For regional patrons, the local newspapers, flyers and speakers at civic groups are among the best resources to raise awareness. We will reach underserved persons through meeting and partnering with organizations that serve this population, creating special offers, and distribute these opportunities through the partners' communication methods to their members. This approach will be buttressed by direct mail and social media. We will actively use Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Linked-In and other on-line methods to target and attract new audiences including substantial targeted click-through services from Google and other providers, ensuring that advertising dollars are not wasted in a scattershot effect.

H. Plans for documenting and evaluating the project.

There will be several methods of evaluation. Quantifiable evaluation will include the number of participating artists, literary and educational events, and play productions; and the accompanying figures for attendance. The project also uses qualitative methods. An evaluation tool will be administered after each educational event; these tools will use a matrix adapted from previous arts education events sponsored by the Inge Center, and developed in conjunction with the former Kansas Arts Commission Arts in Education Department. Response forms will be available at theater productions, and placed at gallery and other events. These forms seek to uncover patron satisfaction, and self-reflection about how the art affects their perspectives. Online questionnaires will be used to gain valuable feedback regarding satisfaction with marketing, experience etc... Allowing us to improve all aspects of the Festival in the future.

I. Goals and impact

The goals of the project are to successfully launch an annual arts event that will inspire those living in Independence and its region. In addition the Festival will serve as serve to stimulate

cultural tourism, transforming the town into an arts Mecca; to invigorate the business and social fabric of the community. We believe that the arts can change lives and communities in the heart of the rural Midwest. The project's impact will foster heightened appreciation of how art can enrich the lives of people of all economic levels and bring people together through their common humanity and love of beauty.

J. Plans for making the project accessible. The project plans to schedule its events in fully accessible facilities, provide large print programs and interpreters for those patrons with disabilities.

