



GUIDE

Five Funding Strategies for Your Theatre

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Take control of your financial destiny

Putting on productions can quickly go from a passion project to a tedious trial when the financial future of your program is up in the air. It is an extremely frustrating affair to be pressured to accommodate the vision of a show to the budget.

It sounds tragically impossible, yet if we harmonize strategy with a little ingenuity, a well-funded program can be more than feasible. The opportunities are out there- if you know where and how to find them!

As theatremakers, it's never a good feeling to have the walls closing in on our creative concepts. You're probably asking, "so how do we bust the fourth wall open?" In this guide, we organize some of our best ideas to help you take control of your theatre's financial destiny. The best time to start is now.



1

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS



Take it from Elphaba: “We are led to those who help us, most to grow if we let them, and we help them in return.” Seeking partnerships with local businesses can be a great way to raise your profile in the community. Some typical approaches that are widely used include:

- Soliciting in-kind donations of material, printing, or lumber for sets in exchange for space in your playbill
- Including your production's flyer in their shop window or on the community bulletin board
- Selling sponsor space in your program for monetary donations
- Partnering with local restaurants to include coupons with a ticket purchase in exchange for advertisement in their shop

These types of cross-promotion are a great way to reach new local audiences and grow recognition of your programming. While it can be uncomfortable to ask for help in these manners, remember that the worst that can happen is they say no, and you've gotten some more word out for your show!





Community Partnerships to Consider



THE LOCAL COSTUME SHOP

This one is self-explanatory, but a great partnership. Consider offering a seasonal agreement between you and your local costume shop, so you both have the reliability of each other's business for a set price.



A SMALL BUSINESS BAKERY

Consider getting your intermission catered by a local bakery! Offer for them to get in touch with the community at your event, and propose sharing the profits in a reasonable share. A mix between the passionate cookie makers with the passionate theatremakers never hurts (unless you have too much icing, but that's not on us).



FREELANCE CONSTRUCTION

Ask the construction workers in your area to help with lumber or set build in exchange for a shout out in your showgram, an aftershow honorable mention, or a portion of your proceeds! Not only will you be able to ensure the safety of your cast and crew with a professionally built set, you can uplift a community organization like your own!



STYLISTS IN YOUR AREA

Barber shops and hair salons are constantly taking new stylists who are hungry for more experience. Approach them to help with all your hair and makeup needs, and they can earn exposure to lots of prospective customers, and stellar content for their resume!



COMMUNITY FLORIST

Employ the florist in your area to earn a great night of business, in exchange for a share of the profit. Have a stand for after-show bouquets in the show lobby, or arrange orders before the show! It's a win win for both organizations!



Pro Tip

On top of great partnership, by teaming up with community arts organizations, you can gain broader qualification opportunities for other grants and funding!





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SPONSORED PROGRAMS

If you're stretched for cash, it's likely that offering shared profits might not be an appealing option for you. Lucky for you, in the business of theatre, you have access to one of the greater options for leverage: a show program.



The Value for You and Your Sponsors

Show programs provide ample space to plug other businesses, organizations and individuals in the community, providing your sponsors with lots of great brand awareness!

Consider offering different types of advertising for different contribution sizes. For example:

- For a meaningful donation on a smaller scale, have a quarter page announcement on the back page of your show program thanking them for their support.
- For a larger donation, consider offering an entire page with an advertisement of their own design!

Make their shoutout extra special with an On The Stage showgram. Our personalized showgrams are designed for you, your show, and your sponsoring organizations, and are the perfect, hassle-free way to show off the amazing people who support your program.



Show your Appreciation

If there's one thing to remember, it's this.

No matter what the size of the donation, someone is going out of their way to support your show and the efforts of the arts in their area. It's important to send them a thank you! A cast-signed letter is a great way to show your gratitude, and can be something actors can sign during rehearsals when they're not onstage!

Even better, create a short video of your cast thanking their sponsors and send it to everyone who contributed to putting on your amazing production. Little things like these go a long way!





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A Look Within the Arts

Building relationships with other organizations in the arts is one of the best ways to grow funding opportunities for your theatre. These sorts of partnerships have become a key funding source for many theatre organizations and can help increase your theatre's exposure in the community too!

Much like Community Partnerships, when approaching another group seeking partnerships, think about how your performing arts can add value to their program's mission. The difference? It's a way more straightforward trade off!





We're All in This Together



THE ACTING SCHOOL

Ensemble can make or break a show, and if you don't have enough bodies for it, this is a great solution. Not only will you be giving a great experience to a new pool of actors, but your ticket sales can jump by bringing a whole new audience base to your show!



ORCHESTRA CLUB

For musicals, it can be expensive to get the right equipment for speakers the whole house can hear. Instead, replace the hassle and elevate the audience experience with a live pit! This is a one of a kind experience you can offer by banding together (pun intended).



HISTORICAL REENACTMENT GROUP

You probably remember these groups from high school social studies, and there's a reason they're memorable! They're wonderfully talented at what they do- and the perfect asset if you're doing a period piece! Working together to share knowledge and bring each other's audiences to one another is valuable to both parties!



LOCAL PHOTOGRAPHERS

Documenting your show allows everyone involved to reminisce forever on the amazing production you all produced. But it can be costly- if you don't look in the right places. Consider partnering with a local photographer to save money and support another artist in your area!

Find new ways to connect the theatre experience and dive deeper into the generous support of the arts community. Now more than ever, working together to lift one another in our respective crafts is an invaluable resource.

"Your website changed the way we do shows and we made at least \$5,000 more than we ever had because it was so easy to hold fundraisers, sell program ads, and sell tickets."

**James Favrote
Center Stage Youth Theatre**



BONUS TIP

Tiered Ticketing

Nurture your community, and let them nurture you.

Another funding strategy that has grown in popularity is using tiered ticketing prices to increase funding. These are used instead of large events and galas to create a VIP experience, while simplifying your event planning strategy.

For different tiers, engage members of your community with behind the scenes looks, exclusive talk-backs, catered options, etc. Reap the benefits of not just a little extra padding in your pocket, but a cast who feel valued and important, and an extra enthusiastic crowd for opening night.

Tiered pricing can also be as simple as those who have the ability to give more, can give, and those who cannot can still enjoy the show at a lower price. Even with tiers at just a ten dollar difference, you'd be surprised how much can add up when people are presented with the meaningful opportunity to contribute a little extra. Even better, this system can also increase accessibility to the arts within your community.



Grants & Foundations



Receiving funding via grants and foundations is a key way many nonprofits and arts organizations operate. Sources from these may vary, but your local Nonprofit or Arts Council should be able to point you in the right direction to get started.

Keep track of artistic organizations in your community to see where they are finding their grants. Building your network of community creatives is a great way to find new sources of grants.





Questions to think about:

What is your program's mission?

✓ When approaching an organization or council for a grant, there's a lot of things you need to come with in your back pocket. Think of it like approaching someone to invest in your business- well, because, they are!

What is your program's mission?

Similar to the first question, your donors are trying to get an understanding of what you plan to do with the funds they grant you. Highlight what's important to you, and how it benefits the community!

Who makes the financial decisions?

If that person is you, it's helpful to highlight what you hope to accomplish with their donation when you answer.

Why is there not adequate funding?

Make sure to be as gracious as you can with this answer, despite any feelings you might have. After all, you want to come off grateful for any amount of funding!

KEEP IN MIND

The best strategy here is to be honest and candid. If you feel like it's been really tough to put together costuming, a set, buy extra script copies, etc. for your shows because of a lack of funding, here's the place to provide some elaboration in those areas. There's no wrong answer to this question. As long as you're not being preposterous ("We needed a real tiger for Garden of Eden!"), your donor is likely just looking for a personal connection in how they can help your theatre organization and being truthfully passionate is your key asset.

DOWNLOADABLE SPREADSHEET

[illegible]

A red square with a white circle inside, and a yellow square with a white circle inside, both with a slight 3D effect.

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Back to Basics: Fundraising

Finally, fundraising is a tried and true method for increasing your theatrical war chest. It may be basic, but that's because it works: and there's tons of fun ways to spice things up.

There's a reason so many organizations engage in fundraising every year. Whether you have exhausted all of your creative ideas, or are looking to amplify your funding extra for your upcoming season, it never hurts to hold some classic fundraisers.

NON-PROFIT PARTNERS

Consider running a fundraising effort, like a car wash, with a local charity organization and sharing the profits. With a wonderful opportunity to support two organizations at the same time, patrons won't pass it up!

DONOR DRIVES

Be specific when running these and consider tying tiers of donations to a specific theatrical need. For example, "For \$50, you can buy a brand new mic for our leads!" People give more when they know what their money will support.

SALES OF GOODS

Whether you're running a bake sale, selling wrapping paper, or any number of other fundraisers, people are likely to give in exchange for goods at a premium

MERCHANDISING

Selling branded clothing and items with your organization's or production's logo and artwork helps create a sense of community and increase awareness while raising funds.

AUCTIONS AND RAFFLES

In a theatre production, there's a lot to auction for a low cost on your end! Posters signed by your whole cast, important props and costumes, an extra show ticket for encore, etc. are all ideas that your audience will love.

Finally, Take a Breather

Fundraising takes time, so it's important to be patient. One wonderful donation can be all the difference you need to be able to stretch your creative visions further. In the meantime, keep these strategies in mind, and brainstorm more of your own. You never know which door you knock on is your big ticket- so keep persevering!

Regardless of what your financial aid may be, we know your production is going to be amazing. Joining theatremakers like you in the process of taking their theatre to the next level is what we love to do, and are best at.



On The Stage

We're in the business of technology, but in service to the arts. Our team has worked one on one with thousands of performing arts organizations to help them reach their potential.

With ready-to-use templates following fundraising best practices, custom campaigns, exclusive VOD ticket sales, and list-building tools to grow your donors, On The Stage has all the tools to increase your self-funding, and keep track of it all.

To learn more about On The Stage and becoming part of our community of theatermakers, schedule a personalized demo today.

Book a Demo

www.onthestage.com

