

AGENDA FOR THE LOS ANGELES THEATRE COMMUNITY

January 27, 2009

This is a living document that will be changed and updated regularly as events occur, more information, ideas or issues are added by contributors, or as actions are taken to address the topics listed.

All of these ideas are on this agenda for further discussion – this is not an agenda of actions to be taken or ideas that have been yet endorsed or approved by any group, including LA Stage Alliance.

MAJOR TOPIC CLUSTERS

AUDIENCE

MONEY

TECHNOLOGY/ONLINE SERVICES

WHO IS THE LOS ANGELES THEATRE COMMUNITY?

COORDINATION

ARTISTIC DIALOGUE

ARTISTIC/PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

VENUES AND SPACES

RULES AND REGULATIONS

TOPIC CLUSTER: AUDIENCE

Issues/Ideas/Goals

Press:

- Address the issue of diminishing press coverage , evidenced by the recent elimination of the Theatre Editor position at LA Weekly and the layoffs of staff at many publications

Identifying/Segmenting/Targeting Audiences:

- Mailing List Exchanges/Email list exchanges
- Increase the regularity of theatre attendance by those who do attend
- Develop new audiences out of the millions of people who don't normally attend theatre
- Clear demographic targeting
- Engage and target university students (in arts and non-arts majors)
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Sending a Message to Audiences:

- Create a method to differentiate shows and companies for patrons and to create an overview of the community
- For the purposes of programming and marketing theatre, discuss what the intrinsic value of theatre is for patrons and artists (Answering the question: WHY SHOULD AUDIENCES CARE?)
- Market/Change the perception of LA as a theatre city, both to the residents and to the world outside LA

Marketing in New Ways:

- Share marketing resources between theatres to create efficiency, reach more patrons, and reduce advertising clutter to patrons
- Explore ganged group sales for all theatres or clusters of theatres
- Find or create a group sales database master who can easily provide good targets based on individual shows or theatres
- Work out a communal deal with American Sign Language interpreters to have some interpreted performances at every production

TOPIC CLUSTER: MONEY

Issues/Ideas/Goals

Sharing Financial Resources:

- Exchange ideas for creative fundraising
- Organize a 'theatre community' giant fundraiser, instead of 300 little fundraisers
- Aggregate Corporate Sponsorships
- Aggregate Buying Power (for material resources/advertising/etc)
- Create a large single endowment for local small theatres

Sharing Financial Knowledge and Expertise:

- Exchange ideas on pricing, salaries, ways to cut costs etc
- Shared bookkeeping/financial administration service
- Explore ways to deal with the chronic problem of 'disappearing actors' to paid jobs during show runs
- Establish community policies about royalties to playwrights
- Create resources that detail how to progress small theatres to midsize status (or how organizations have done so)
- Create a manual on where to go to raise money and basic fundraising in this community
- Resources on how to put together a Board
- Clear information on how to achieve sustainability

Partnering with Other Industries:

- Building relations with the Film/Television Industry
- Coordinate arts education programs and resources to mutually support, be efficient, and not compete
- Explore government subsidies
- Find ways to attach a theatre to another business in a symbiotic relationship

Gathering Support from Civic Sources:

- Explore a vision of Los Angeles as a city with a theatre in every neighborhood

Non-Profits:

- Bring together clear resources that explain how non-profits can or do operate, the pros and cons of being non-profit, and how non-profits can still make money

TOPIC CLUSTER: TECHNOLOGY/ONLINE SERVICES

Issues/Ideas/Goals

Coordinating Current Electronic Services:

- BigCheapTheatre.com
- BigCheap@yahoo.com
- LAStageAlliance.com
- LAStageBlog.com
- Plays411.com
- BrownPaperTickets.com
- OvationTix.com
- Social Networking Sites

Creating a Central, Online, Comprehensive Resource:

- ONE WEBSITE FOR THEATRE LISTINGS to keep theatre marketing people from going insane (And to market to patrons more easily)
- Improved box office technology
- Theatre 'Craigslist' for buying/selling/staffing
- One mass email service to theatre artists/creators for papering/community notifications
- Create a full directory/resource guide to theatre organizations/theatre venues/theatre artists for finding space/staffing/press releases/history
- IMDB-esque resource

Using Technology in Brand New Ways:

- Remote Broadcast of live performances to dark theatres to leverage technology and combat geography issues
- Find a new electronic media option that takes up the space created with the departure of newspapers
- Create a Daily Candy-esque blast about what offerings are available
- Engaging the audience on a technological level - discount cards, Member Clubs, etc.
- Collaborative online marketing efforts

Technology Support:

- Establish a co-op IT technician service
- Basic training on technology for theatres

TOPIC CLUSTER:
WHO IS THE LOS ANGELES THEATRE COMMUNITY?
Issues/Ideas/Goals

Exploring Models for How Theatre Organizations Operate:

- Continued 'Growth' vs. Staying Who You Are
- Membership or not?
- Volunteer vs. Part Time vs. Full Time and how that changes things
- Defining actual goals of individual companies (not 'mission statements')

Identifying the Breadth and Depth of the Artists:

- Find a language or terms to differentiate shows and companies so theater artists can find each other and an artistic home
- Explore Professionalism vs. Dilettantism
- Come up with new labels for types of theatre, with the idea that the current labels aren't clear and/or descriptive enough
- Redefining the levels of theatre in LA

Perception:

- Identify and support how the theatre community wants to represent itself to the residents of LA and to the world
- Marketing LA as a Theatre City
- Explore what theatre is in LA in 2009, as opposed to what it is in other cities or was at other times
- Possible vision of Los Angeles as a city with a theatre in every neighborhood
- Engaging your neighborhood - the pros and cons, the challenges and opportunities
- Develop interesting advertising campaigns for the LA theatre community
- Increase coverage/awareness of theatre as a whole

Visioning for the Future:

- What does the community want to become?

TOPIC CLUSTER: COORDINATION

Issues/Ideas/Goals

Leadership and Community Organization:

- Create a Council of Theatres
- Create theatre 'districts' or 'regions' – possibly like states connecting to a central 'federal' council
- Regular theatre meetings (monthly or bi-monthly), hosted around town, to bring people together, allow discussion of events/resources, etc and address issues that come up on a timely basis
- Increase a sense of cohesion in the community
- Coordination of show schedules to provide a 'theatre season' and/or community events to generate publicity
- Gather information from other cities and for national comparison and collaboration.
- Create an LA version of Theatre Facts (TCG). Economic Analysis of LA Theatres. Benchmarking.
- Bring more theatres into LA Stage Alliance – particularly those currently held outside due to financial pressures

Artistic Collaboration:

- Find ways to encourage and promote co-productions between theatres
- Facilitate collaboration on Dreams - how to get people together who are excited about the same things (Who has a burning desire to do Equus? Me too!)
- Coordination of shows/schedules to avoid 4 simultaneous productions of MIDSUMMER
- Area-Wide Annual Audition
- Area-Wide or regional meetings for different artist types (playwrights, directors, etc)

Practical Joint Efforts:

- Collaborative Marketing/PR efforts
- Joint storage space/prop-costume rental house
- Resource efficiencies/sharing physical resources
- Play 7 and/or other 'group pass' or 'group subscription' ideas
- Coordinated, vetted liasons with universities. During school year paid internship or credit internship program.

TOPIC CLUSTER: ARTISTIC DIALOGUE

Issues/Ideas/Goals

Big Picture Artistic Efforts:

- Identifying showcases, the role they play, and helping them do a better job and what they are and not being confused with other types of work
- Explore Theatre Festivals and the pros/cons of creating one or more of them
- Create an overview of the entire Artistic Ecosystem
- Conversation on Artistic Excellence – how it can be identified, promoted, and increased
- Helping theatres with Quality Control - changing the way of thinking about it. Dealing with the fact that programming in many theatres is like a restaurant that changes the menu (and kitchen staff) entirely every six weeks.

Dialogue on Productions Already Being Presented:

- How to address the steady departure of theatre critics and editors from the mainstream press
- How to identify 'real critics' in the online world, and even define that term at all
- Answering the questions: What does the theatre community want from critics? What do critics want from the theatre artists?
- How to co-op the central authority of the LA Times to review and/or feature stories on the theatre community
- Finding a way to coordinate criticism in LA so that it is most effective, and so that it effectively covers the entire landscape – possibly with a main coordinator of some sort

TOPIC CLUSTER:
ARTISTIC/PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Issues/Ideas/Goals

Play Development:

- Gathering resources on companies and services that engage with new plays or play development activities

Artist Development:

- Create effective showcase opportunities for different disciplines
- Area-Wide Annual Audition
- Establish an artist mentoring program
- Create channels for new artists to engage with active theatre companies to develop their skills
- Engage the unions (AEA, SSDC, USA, Dramatist's) in an improvement process for their artists
- Allowing new artists a forum to practice their skills and learn and do what they're passionate about, without having to put up a full production with all the associated costs – and without that production having to compete for audience with productions intended and created for audiences
- Create tools for self-examination/benchmarking on your own artistic progress and setting goals
- Teaching playwrights how to get their work produced - but also how to distinguish a good producer and/or director so that the script is produced well
- Inter-disciplinary training - not just seminars on how to stage manage, but how directors should appropriately deal with stage managers

Organizational Development:

- Nurturing and/or shepherding new companies
- Create tools for self-examination/benchmarking on your own organization's progress and setting goals
- Providing ways for artists who only want to put up one show to interface with established companies, instead of having to create a new entity just for one production
- Create resources that detail how to progress small theatres to midsize status (or how organizations have done so)

Creating Consistency in Los Angeles Theatre:

- Standard training seminars for theatre people in different theatre jobs
- Seminar for producers that make them a certified 'LA producer' to create a community of producers helping each other with a shared knowledge base.
- Standardized advisory production manual.
- Establishing a 'certification' of professionalism for artists of any type that is based on new standards of what 'professionalism' means, as the old definitions do not necessarily apply in LA theatre in 2009

TOPIC CLUSTER: VENUES AND SPACES

Issues/Ideas/Goals

How to Operate a Facility:

- Consolidating information and best practices on operating a venue
- "How to Keep a Venue Alive"

How to Find a Venue:

- Explore the vision of Los Angeles as a City with a theatre in every neighborhood
- Create a full online directory/resource guide to theatre venues for purchase/rental/partnering (includes Rehearsal Spaces)
- Bring together information on the condition and/or safety of various rental venues
- Coordinate the managers of rental spaces
- Match up people who want to do a show with established companies to maximize efficiency
- Comprehensive list of ways to find a new facility, via civic entities, CRA, etc.

TOPIC CLUSTER: RULES AND REGULATIONS

Issues/Ideas/Goals

Unions:

- Training and information on the various AEA contracts
- Find ways to interface more clearly or productively with AEA
- Engage with SSDC/USA/Dramatist's Guild Unions in LA
- Interfacing/Hiring musicians for theatre productions
- Health Insurance repairs with current unions

External Legal Issues:

- Clarity of available Insurance Policies/Group Insurance
- Building/Fire Code clarification (possibly establish a go-to liaison)
- Parking Issues/Rules/Changes
- Clarifications of rules re: ABC, donations, copyrights, music in shows.
- Contracts for theatre artists & Intellectual property

Connecting with Government Agencies:

- City of LA or other Cities
- Los Angeles County or other Counties
- State of California

Advocacy:

- Activating the community as a unit for advocacy purposes