

CITY BRIDGE TRUST – Delegated Authority (Requests £50,001 to £100k)

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY: Bridging Divides - Connecting the Capital\Arts, sports, health and/or well-being projects for disabled people

Park Theatre

Ref: 16563

Adv: Natalie Jordan

Amount requested: £58,005

Base: Islington

{Revised request: £36,208}

Benefit: Islington

Amount recommended: £36,200

Purpose of grant request: Continuation funding for an accessible performance programme and access audience development.

The Applicant

The Park Theatre (PT) opened in May 2013 in a converted vacant office block next to Finsbury Park station. It is based at the meeting point of the three boroughs of Islington, Haringey and Hackney. The venue is purpose-built with two performance spaces—one with 200 seats and the other accommodating an audience of 90—workshop space, plus an all-day café bar. It welcomes 100,000 visitors to its 25 productions a year which include a mix of new writing and modern revivals.

Background and detail of proposal

Since July 2017, a three-year grant from the Trust has funded a year-round programme of accessible performances at PT, offering audiences who are deaf, disabled, visually impaired, on the autistic spectrum, or those who have conditions that mean a regular audience environment can cause anxiety, the opportunity to enjoy theatre. The programme ensures that all productions showcased at the theatre are adapted, both those developed internally and supporting external production companies to improve the accessibility of their shows; this can include supporting to deliver a relaxed performance, making sound and lighting less extreme, providing pre-show notes, providing “touch tours” of the set, and some staff members have been trained such that captioning and audio description can now be sourced internally.

PT seeks two further years of continuation funding to support the costs of adapting productions as described. With this, a greater proportion of the budget than previously will support the continued employment of the Access Co-Ordinator, assisted by an Access Duty Manager role created last year. The Access Co-Ordinator connects with local disability organisations and networks to develop the accessible offer and promote the programme, and both roles work across the organisation ensuring that access is included as an essential requirement in all developing work streams.

All access users are tagged in the box office system such that they can receive tailored support depending on requirements. There were, at the time of application, over 800 access users on the theatre’s database. Caption users have recently made up 15% of the audience of recent productions.

PT is currently in the midst its third year of funding from the Trust; reporting on its first two years has been of a good quality and has shaped this proposal for continuation, with realistic targets for numbers of accessible performances. PT have noted the sectors' growing access offer, which, whilst introducing some competition for audience, also provides a rich opportunity to share learning: PT have standing relationships with the nearby Almeida in Islington and the Arcola in Hackney, for instance, with whom resources have been shared. PT have done advisory work and engaged other arts organisations in these issues through its networks.

A revised budget was advised and submitted during assessment, as it was identified that the level of funding sought was not in proportion with the annual amount offered in the existing grant. The application also included some accessible facilities improvements; whilst an exception had been made in its original grant for some funding towards capital equipment relating to access, as it is not your usual policy to offer simultaneous capital and revenue funding and these elements have not been supported by an independent access audit, they too have been removed from the budget for this request. PT intend to separately fundraise for this and have otherwise identified internal capacity to deliver some training originally included in the request.

Financial Information

With the closure of venues under Covid-19 lockdown, PT have seen income from performances and the café-bar cease entirely. In response to the crisis, £300,000 in donations has been secured from supporters and a wider public campaign is ongoing. The majority of staff have been furloughed and will be brought back as the scheme ends in October, with a view to a February/March 2021 reopening to the public. The form under which PT will be able to operate is currently unclear, with the viability of socially distanced theatre still to be tested. PT are also aware that access users will be some of the last to return to theatres.

A conversion to core of a small proportion of the existing grant (£2,500) has already been agreed, and the offer to convert more (to no more than a 12 month equivalent including costs already converted) will be made to the organisation for further consideration, should you agree this grant.

In its most recent signed accounts for the year ending March 2019, PT saw an overall deficit due to losses in its café-bar and a drop in fundraising (due in part to no large-scale event having been delivered as in the prior year) and less income from rent due to more productions moving in-house. Free reserves held (excluding fixed assets and stock) of £229,210 exceeded the policy target of £200,000.

Recommendation

£36,200 over two further and final years (2 x £18,100) for the delivery of accessible performances for disabled audiences, deaf awareness training, and Evac Chair training.

Approved.....
Chief Grants Officer

Date.....