

# **The Kim Squiers Foundation Application for Funding**

## **Cover Sheet/General Information**

Organizational Contact Name: Marcus Chapman

Project Title: Grand Rapids Civic Theatre Student Intensive

Project Start Date: November 1, 2020

Project End Date: April 1, 2023

Amount Requested: \$392,697

Total Budget Amount: \$392,697

## **Abstract/Summary**

Grand Rapids Civic Theatre (GRCT) believes that theatre and art are foundations of any well-rounded education. However, many urban schools in the Grand Rapids area, specifically Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS), do not provide a theatre program or teach any theatrical courses. As one of the largest performing arts schools in the nation, GRCT believes it is their responsibility to assure that all students who may have a passion for acting, singing, dancing, set painting, lighting/sound design, or any other area of theatre has the opportunity to explore that. Beyond that, even those students who may never have an interest in pursuing theatre as a career should have the chance to experience all that theatre has to offer.

## **Problem Statement or Need Statement**

The American Alliance for Theatre & Education (AATE) conducted a study in 2018 and found that, even in low-income areas, students who were involved in theatre scored on average 99 points better (65 in communication and 34 in mathematics) than their peers on the SAT. According to the 2019 Michigan SAT Suite Annual Report, other than Asian students, all minorities scored significantly lower than their white counterparts, with the average gap being 153.5 points out of 1600. These statistics show that Michigan is one of the worst states in balancing education between white students and students of color.

Theatre has been shown to increase overall academic capability and decrease drop-out rates. In addition to academics, theatre has also been shown to improve many other skills that can be taken and applied to all aspects of life. The same AATE study found that students who participated in theatre had developed a higher sense of self-worth and confidence, as well as the ability to effectively communicate with peers.

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However, students of color often do not get to share in this advancement because of funding limitations or lack of influence. A study conducted by the Michigan Department of Education found that 56% of schools budgeted less than \$1,000 for the arts, and 27% reported no budget at all. These numbers disproportionally affect communities of color. Theatre is expensive, and many urban schools are underfunded and do not have the monetary capability to afford a theatre program. This means that students who attend these schools often are not exposed to theatre and are never able to establish that relationship and develop those unique skills.

Furthermore, the Educational Theatre Association released a study in 2012 that showed only 6% of high school theatre teachers/instructors are people of color. The Michigan Department of Education Racial Census noted that Grand Rapids Public School, which hosts more than 17,000 students at 13 different schools, has a student minority population of 78% and yet 88% of the 1,400 teachers are white.

Dr. Comer, a Yale Professor and Child Psychiatrist, says, “No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship.” The Council for the Accreditation for Teacher Preparation enhances this argument by pointing out that minority students, especially those in low-income families, grow up and develop an inherent sense of distrust. Black, Latinx, and other students of color must be able to see people like them represented in leadership positions in the visual arts and be led by them, in order to allow themselves to open up and trust the instructor and receive the most benefit from their experience.

### **Goal**

GRCT strives to help students build self-confidence and expand the world of theatre to those whom it often leaves behind, in hope that new skills will be developed and utilized in all aspects of life.

### **Objectives**

#### **Outcome Objectives:**

- Using a pre-test/post-test and staff observations, 80% of students will develop basic and specialized skills in the theatre arts (acting, set design, lighting, costuming, etc.).
- 80% Students will report increased self-confidence and sense of self-worth.

#### **Process Objectives:**

- Using Census data and the Grand Rapids Public Schools demographics as a guide, the staff of the GRCT Student Intensive will racially and ethnically mirror program participants.

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- GRCT Student Intensive will perform two affordable show-runs a year to increase access to theatre for underserved community members.

### **Project Narrative/Project Description**

This program will recruit high school students who have an interest in any area of theatre, following two “tracks:” the performance track and the production track. The performance track is the 16-20 performance students who will be performing in the shows. The production track will be students that have interest in other areas, such as set design/construction, lighting design, costume design, sound technician, as well as however many crew members the production needs. The total of students should not surpass 30 at the most.

Students will audition/interview for their spots in the show or to be part of the production track approximately two months before the performances and they will begin work almost immediately. Actors will be in rehearsal with their directors and stage managers working to block and perfect the show, while production track students will be working with the resident designers to learn more about their craft and help build/design the show they are working on. A unique aspect of this program is students on the production track will not only be learning how to use and understand the equipment, but also have a say in the actual design.

Students will rehearse five nights of the week between 6:30pm-10pm, specific rehearsal times will be decided on by the show’s production team. This is the same schedule that all GRCT mainstage shows follow, in hopes of providing the most authentic experience.

The shows will be decided on by the Program Director and then voted on and approved by the Board of Directors at the same time the mainstage season is approved. The Program Director is the sole entity in the selection process, coming up with four shows a season, two that are their first preference and two that are their second choices. However, that being said, the Program Director may ask for help from anybody in the process and will be encouraged to take suggestions from the students and the staff.

Once the shows are selected and approved, the two outreach coordinators will begin reaching out to english teachers and school administrators within the area to begin the recruitment process. They will be finding appropriate times to stop into classrooms and speak about the program, as well as handing out information and recruiting potential students at the Grand Rapids Public Library, who has always been a close partner of GRCT. Recruiting will take place for approximately four weeks immediately before the auditions of each show. However, program information and opportunity information will be available year-round on GRCT’s website.

This program is geared primarily for students of color. Students who often do not feel they are being heard or appreciated in the arts. To best equip themselves, GRCT plans to establish an Outreach Board of Volunteers from the targeted community to help the program as it starts, develops, and grows. These volunteers will be a diverse group of people ranging from business owners to teachers/school administrators, to parents of students within the program. This group will meet once every month to collaborate with the Program Director on how to make sure the program best adjusts to the community involved.

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The Outreach Board and leaders within the program, like all GRCT teachers, will be kept on a limited, time-constricted contract. This way, as the program develops, we can assure that the racial distribution in our students is appropriately represented within the faculty. GRCT will also distribute evaluation surveys at the end of every show process to ask, not only the students but also the faculty, how the program can be improved and refocused. With both this and the Outreach Board of Volunteers, GRCT believes that the program can continue to develop and adjust as the community that it serves deems fit.

In an effort to increase accessibility, GRCT will be blocking out space in their auditorium for these students to perform. The tickets for the event will be heavily discounted from the usual rate to help make the performance more accessible to people who do not typically have the funds to attend theatre. There will also be an online “Scholarship Application,” where families who face economic hardship can apply to attend the performance for free.

GRCT understands that because of societal constraints that have been in place since the formation of this country, black and other people of color have had limited exposure to theatre and art due to its high price tag. This is why GRCT believes it is their responsibility to reach out to these students and their families and welcome them into the world of theatre. This also includes students not interested in being a part of the program by still encouraging them to attend the performances to support their peers.

### **Staffing Plan**

For this particular project, there are several factors that GRCT will be looking for in the hiring and delegating process. GRCT plans to create a new full-time “Program Director” position who will work year-round to make sure everything is in order and going smoothly. This person will also be the mediator between the Outreach Board of Volunteers and the GRCT Board of Directors. The qualifications of this person will be somebody with a background in diversity and inclusion, as well as theatre business and educational outreach. This person will need to know Grand Rapids very well and be a welcoming figurehead for people while also being incredibly efficient at their job.

GRCT also plans on hiring two part-time staff members who will be in charge of recruitment and transportation. These are the people who will be in contact with the schools, as well as the people driving the vans. The most important features for these people is their approachability, their experience with outreach, and their driving record. These positions should also reflect the intent of the program, which is to have a very diverse and reflective staff. It would be ideal for these positions to be people of color, as they are most likely the ones who will be interacting with prospective students. Special consideration will be given to recent alumni from GRPS in the hiring process.

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Beyond that, the contract faculty, which includes show directors, music directors, choreographers, fight specialists, accent coaches, etc. these will all be “on-demand” requirements. For example, if the program were to put on Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, they would need a very knowledgeable and experienced fight choreographer. As stated above these positions will reflect the student body, in hopes of providing appropriate and effective representation.

### **Time Line**

#### **November 2020**

- Hire Program Director
- Begin Show Selection

#### **December 2020**

- Hire Outreach and Transportation
- Solidify Show Decisions

#### **January 2021**

- Begin reaching out to schools
- Generate the Outreach Board of Volunteers
- Hire May show staff
- Begin Pre-production Meetings

#### **March 2021**

- Hold auditions for May show
- Begin rehearsals for May show
- Bring students to attend the mainstage season show

#### **May 2021**

- Perform Show (two weekend run with eight shows total)

#### **June 2021**

- Review evaluation material and adjust program as needed

#### **July 2021**

- Hire October Show Staff
- Begin Pre-production Meetings

#### **August 2021**

- Hold auditions for October show
- Begin rehearsals for October show

#### **September 2021**

- Bring students to attend the mainstage season show

#### **October 2021**

- Perform Show (two weekend run eight shows total)

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### **Evaluation Plan**

As stated above our objectives in measuring the success of our program will be:

- Using a pre-test/post-test and staff observations, 80% of students will develop basic and specialized skills in the theatre arts (acting, set design, lighting, costuming, etc.).
- 80% Students will report increased self-confidence and sense of self-worth.
- Using Census data and the Grand Rapids Public Schools demographics as a guide, the staff of the GRCT Student Intensive will racially and ethnically mirror program participants.
- GRCT Student Intensive will perform two affordable show-runs a year to increase access to the theatre for underserved community members.

The success of each of these objectives can easily be determined by a simple pre-, post-, and follow up survey process that will be sent to every student, volunteer, staff member and a random selection of audience members. At the very first rehearsal or designer meeting, students will be asked to fill out a short pre-test/survey that asks them several questions about theatre in general and their specific field. Students will be given the same test on the closing night of their performance. The success will be measured by if the goal of 80% student improvement is reached or not. On this post-survey, students will also be asked if they feel their self-confidence or sense of self-worth has improved because of their experience in the intensive. The success rate for this will also be 80%.

During the hiring process for the production team, GRCT will be using the Census data, demographic information from GRPS, as well as data collected by a voluntary demographics survey from previous productions to assure that the staff resembles the ethnic and cultural build of the students. This will be measured by additional questions asked on the post-survey where students will say whether or not they felt represented within the leadership of the program. Beyond the people within the intensive, a random 100 audience members that attend the performance will be emailed a simple question “Do you feel this ticket price was affordable?” Based on their answers GRCT will continue to adjust the price to make sure people feel the theatre is appropriately accessible to all people.

Should GRCT not succeed in any of these objectives, or complaints arise throughout the process, it is the job of the Program Director and the Board of Volunteers to change things. They will need to ensure that what needs to be done to get the program where it needs to be is done by the time the next show auditions for the best odds to avoid any future slips.

### **Collaboration Plan**

GRCT has gained and maintained many strong relationships with local businesses and organizations within the community. However, none are more important to this program as our connection to Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS) and the Grand Rapids Public Library (GRPL). These organizations are the key elements in assuring that we are able to recruit and

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interest the student body we are targeting. Both of these organizations have collaborated with us in the past from small things like, hanging up posters and telling students about the classes available, to larger events like, sending hundreds of students to attend our children's shows and hosting our travelling troupe.

GRPS is a vital part of the recruitment process for the Student Outreach Initiative as it contains the very students that would best benefit from the program; 76.9% of the students at GRPS are people of color, and over 75% are economically disadvantaged. Beyond that, however, because GRPS is so wide spread, many of their individual schools do not contain a theatre program. We hope to be able to do what we can to still allow the creative minds of these students to express themselves, without pressuring GRPS to have to allocate funds into a program they could not afford.

GRCT hopes that this Initiative will help build our relationship even further with both of these organizations. It is imperative to us that we have members from GRPS and GRPL on our Outreach Board of Volunteers to assure that the goals of the program also align with that of theirs. Within our hiring process, we will also be looking into alumni from GRPS to fill our Recruitment Manager positions. This will guarantee that they have at least some relationship with the faculty, the area, and hopefully can generate a positive response from the students.

### **Sustainability Plan**

GRCT looks forward to providing the Student Intensive to underserved students for many years, by incorporating the programs funding into the existing budget. GRCT receives aid from various and diverse sources, including the federal government, the state of Michigan, production ticket sales, many local business partners, and, above all, our individual donors throughout the community. In 2017, GRCT launched a program called "Civic Loyal" where special privileges were granted to patrons who committed to different amounts and time-varied donations. The success of Civic Loyal has directly allowed GRCT to launch this initiative. They see it as giving back to the community that has shown so much support for them.

By incorporating the cost of the Intensive into the main budget of the theatre, the program will also benefit from the annual fundraising activities. The most successful one of these being the Donor Concert & Dinner, which GRCT has held for the past eight years. Donors pay a small fee to attend, which pays for their dinner and two drink tickets. As they eat, volunteers from the mainstage shows perform for them, and donations are collected throughout the night. As the Intensive grows and develops, GRCT anticipates performing segments from these shows as well at the dinner.

GRCT, as one of the largest and oldest non-profit theatres in the nation, has always been and will continue to be supported by local partners and patrons, and they hope to continue to expand and progress alongside their community.



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### **Budget Justification**

#### Senior Personnel

The Program Director will be the only staff member that will be working on this project year round and will be the only full-time professional as well. This position will be filled by someone who has extensive training and experience in diversity and minority appreciation, educational outreach, and preferably a 4-year degree in theatre administration or an equivalent field, but not required. They will also receive a 2% wage increase in their 3rd year.

The Program Director will be responsible for all the ins and outs of the project. This will include show selection, staff management, evaluation assistance, quality assurance, organization of the Volunteer's Board, and more misc. administrative work. They will oversee the entire program and will be extremely crucial for its success.

Year 1: \$29,952      Year 2: \$29,952      Year 3: \$30,551

#### Other Personnel

Two Part-time employees that act as the outreach specialists and after the recruitment period their main task is driving the vans to collect the students who would typically be without transportation. These two people will also have some experience in outreach but will most likely be given to recent high school graduates from the surrounding high schools that can best relate and communicate with the potential students. They will work 18 hours a week at \$14/hr.

The show staff will be paid on the same stipend base we pay our other production teams for our children's shows. This includes the Director and the Stage Manager, who will be the main two people in charge of the shows themselves who work the closest with the students. These will be local directors with at least some experience, no degree required.

Year 1: \$28, 608      Year 2: \$28,608      Year 3: \$28,608

#### Fringe Benefits

For the Program Director, the fringe rates are 7.65% for FICA; 26% for retirement; and 20% for health insurance calculated on annual base salary. For the outreach directors fringe is 7.65% for FICA calculated on hourly wages.

Year 1: \$18,074      Year 2: \$18,074      Year 3: \$18.074

#### Travel

GRCT will be using the two vans that are already in their possession to form a make-shift bus route (one headed north and one head south) to retrieve students who would otherwise not have transportation. The rate for mileage will be \$0.56/mile. They anticipate using both these vans a



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total of 140 days, driving on average 10 miles per day. This will include extra trips bringing students to the theatre to attend mainstage shows.

Year 1: \$1,568      Year 2: \$1,568      Year 3: \$1,568

**Materials & Supplies**

Materials that will be needed for every show will encompass the budget for the set, the costumes, the lighting and sound design, and the props.

Year 1: \$4,000      Year 2: \$4,000      Year 3: \$4,000

**Other**

Plays, that are not within the public domain, charge playwriting fees, this will encompass those. As well as an auxiliary position on a production team for both show slots that can be filled based on what the director feels they need (fight choreographer, dialect coach, etc.). This will also go towards the promotional budget, to help spread the word and provide the outreach directors with the supplies they need.

Year 1: \$3,600      Year 2: \$3,600      Year 3: \$3,600

**Total Direct Costs**

Year 1: \$85,802      Year 2: \$85,802      Year 3: \$86,72

**F&A**

The rate for facilities and administration that GRCT will be using is 52% of the total direct costs.

Year 1: \$44,617      Year 2: \$44,617      Year 3: \$45,096

**Total Direct & Indirect Costs**

Year 1: \$130,419      Year 2: \$130,419      Year 3: \$131,818

**Amount of this request: \$392,657**