



## Open Eye Theatre

Flexible Support FY22 Sample Grant Application

### Group's Purpose

Open Eye Theatre was founded in 2000 with the goal of creating an artist-driven and artist-supporting organization to provide a springboard for emerging artists to make career-defining leaps and a sanctuary for established artists to experiment and innovate. Initially an itinerant company, Open Eye converted raw spaces into theatres to present original work by Minnesota artists that included holiday pageants, small portable "suitcase" performances, and full-length productions combining actors, puppetry, and objects in elaborately designed environments with live musicians playing original scores.

In 2007, Open Eye Theatre settled in Minneapolis' Phillips neighborhood, and converted a historic brick storefront into a 90-seat theatre with administrative office and workshop spaces. Now 20 years old, Open Eye Theatre has evolved into a vital multi-disciplinary arts hub that produces, presents, and commissions over 200 performances a year by a diverse array of artists who work in the disciplines of puppetry, theatre, live music, opera, storytelling, and dance.

In 2003 the Driveway Tour was created to leveraging our puppetry program, develop emerging artists and foster grassroots community beyond our building by drawing people together in neighborhood partnerships for accessible family-friendly puppet shows. Reaching over 50 diverse communities and over 5000 people annually, the Driveway Tour is recognized nationally as a successful model to engage communities in the arts.

### Grant Number & Project Name

FS22-1-191 Capitol Improvement Project - Modular Stage & ADA Accessible Ramp

### Project/Program Description

Funding to renovate Open Eye's 20-year-old modular stage and include an accessible wheelchair ramp to better serve our artist community.

## Project or Program

1. Open Eye Theatre faces a looming obligation (and opportunity) to renovate the modular stage platforming of our theater, which is now entering its third decade of service and is badly in need of reinforcement and/or replacement. Because the original stage platform system did not include an option for accommodating a wheelchair ramp, now is the perfect time to correct that oversight. While our building is ADA accessible for patrons, the stage has been less inviting to artists who use wheels or other mobility aids. In the past, artists have needed to be physically lifted on/off the stage by their assistants.
2. The goal for this project is to work with an architect to create a completely accessible stage space by designing a custom wheelchair ramp that can be incorporated into the modular platforming system originally designed for the theatre. The Open Eye stage is characterized by its intimate size, so a functional ramp will need to be designed to install easily, and store under the stage when not in use. Existing platforms, now over 20 years old, need to be replaced--a perfect opportunity to engineer a ramp into the modular system.
3. This project aligns with our organizational mission and goals as a multi-disciplinary and multicultural arts hub that serves a wide constituency. The lack of legitimate accessibility to the stage falls short of the artistic hospitality we aspire to provide. We have consulted with several Minnesota performing artists who use mobility aids, such as Gabriel Roderick and Gaelynn Lea, who underscore the fact that they are often limited in their options for professional settings for their work due to lack of stage access--usually performing in gyms or churches that offer accessibility, but none of the technical infrastructure that would best allow them to explore a more expansive vision of their performances. According to Lea, "I would love to perform a concert in a space that could give me beautiful lights and professional sound support--but that's often just not possible." This capital project would enable Open Eye to provide the same calibre of production support to all artists who use mobility aids. Also importantly, MRAC funding would allow us to achieve a renewed stage platform system with wheelchair ramp without needing to pass that cost along: we can continue to keep our venue rental rates among the most affordable in town.
4. If funded, Open Eye could commit to a full stage renovation with wheelchair ramp in either January or April 2022, when the theater would be dark for 2 weeks to allow for the work to be done on site. Prior to that, we would engage with a licensed architect/engineer to design the ramp, and have a professional build team under the direction of a master carpenter/welder complete the work. The work could be completed by May--and provide another 20 years of enhanced functional life to this theater and the artists who create here.

## Community

1. The most immediate beneficiaries of this program would be an expanded range of artists who can perform and create at Open Eye. Open Eye annually serves an

average of 236 individual artists, commissioning and producing at least 5 MainStage shows per year, and presenting or hosting another 12-14 guest artists groups. In non-COVID years, the stage is rarely empty--a testament to the rich creativity in the Twin Cities and to the fact that we have seen a reduction in affordable, well-maintained performances spaces.

2. The artists using the Open Eye stage include both emerging and established artists from LGBTQ, Black, Asian, Indigenous, and Disability communities. In recent seasons programming has served 35-45% artists of color. Any artists with mobility needs (not just those with disability, but also those who are simply aged) can have a more challenging time navigating our space, and this project would effectively erase that barrier for them. We also feel that the audiences who come to this space would benefit from the project over time--without even being on stage themselves--because the project would expand the range of artists capable to performing on the stage. If the theater can include everyone, it naturally grows in every direction--and the art gets better, too.

3. Open Eye would work with Susan Raffael, a licensed architect and structural engineer with experience in modifying small spaces for mobility access; Open Eye's project leader would be Joel Sass, Producing Artistic Director, who has initiated the project with the theatre board and received their approval to draw \$5000 from the theatre reserve to supplement the funds needed to complete the project. Staff technical director of 6 years Brandon Sisneroz would serve as the master carpenter on the build, with a team of 3 professional builders on his team. An advisory group of 3 artists with mobility needs would be compensated for their input and review of the design before fabrication or construction would begin. Everyone of the project team has a relationship to the theatre or a commitment to accessibility. The timeline for the project would be fairly straight forward: the existing modular stage is already documented in architectural drawings, which expedites the work of the architect in designing a wheelchair ramp into the system.

## Proposal Budget

### Project Budget Expenses

\$4,000 - Architectural Services

\$1,250 - Technical drafting

\$1,500 - Honorariums for Artistic consultants / advisors (\$500 x 3)

\$2,200 - Lead Builder (\$55/hr x 40 hrs)

\$3,900 - 3 carpenters ( \$32.5/hr x 40 hrs)

\$5,500 - Materials (wood/steel/hardware/paint)

\$650 - Paint / non-skid laminate for ramp

\$1,000 - Contingency

### Total Project Cash Expenses

\$20,000.00

## Amount Requested

\$15,000.00

## Project Budget Income

\$15,000 - MRAC Flexible Support Grant

\$5,000 - Open Eye Reserve Fund authorization

## Total Project Cash Income

\$20,000.00

## ***(Important!)*** Additional Fields Required

Please note that in the full application there are additional fields that will need to be completed and are not shown to panelists.