



Theatre Bristol

Business Plan 2015 - 18

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Theatre Bristol: Business Plan 2015 - 2018

We are Theatre Bristol. We want to make Bristol a world leader for brilliant theatre. We want Bristol to be the best place for artists and audiences to make and experience the most exciting theatre.

We cannot do this in isolation, but only through openness and collaboration. Our role is to encourage, stimulate and support multiplicity and dialogue, sustainability and independent strength, artistic brilliance and managerial robustness, innovation and best practice, collaboration and cross-fertilisation. When you share stuff, everyone gets better.

We would like to invite anyone who has an interest in theatre or Bristol or both to join us on our journey.

Theatre Bristol exists to drive up quality.

“Culture is capable both of having profound value in its own terms and of delivering a wider return on public investment. The important thing is that the quality of the process and the quality of the outcome are inextricably linked. Whether it happens in the Theatre Royal or a community centre, the ability to create social and economic impact depends on the integrity of the art. Bad work goes nowhere – it alienates the people it is aimed at while frustrating both the practitioners that make it and the funders that support it. It is only by driving up quality (of both process and outcome) that we achieve both excellence and access” from *Bristol Live: a performance culture of ambition*

By quality, we mean impact on people, richness of experience and depth of engagement. It’s about the art, and who it touches. Whether by expressing alternative ways of being, creating beauty, joy, community, political challenge, generating understanding, revelation, exhilaration, anger, laughter or countless other surprising experiences, art makes the world a better place for everyone to live in.

Theatre Bristol works because it is independent. It is non-curatorially-led, non-status led. We have trust, informed overview and expertise. We are able to make change WITH our community (not on it, against it or parallel to it). We are open to everyone. We build and maintain community.

Our power is in using that overview to look to the long term on behalf of our community – sometimes cutting the difficult path; holding our nerve for the long-term goals that will strengthen Bristol as a home for inspiring artists and brilliant theatre.

Theatre Bristol’s approach

Theatre Bristol’s approach is to think like an artist, designing our activity in response to the best ideas and delivering them through the best possible collaborations. As US-based Kenneth J Foster says in his paper, *Thriving in an Uncertain World*:

“the artistic process itself contains within it the seeds of our organizational survival... We recognize the constantly changing environment and adapt and respond accordingly. We know we are thought leaders for our culture, so we innovate, we try new ideas and approaches and view each endeavor not as a success or failure but simply another

incursion into a deeper understanding of who we are. In doing so, we provide leadership to our world. And we behave like the artists we are.”

Our starting point is to believe that anything is possible. We want to respond dynamically to good ideas. To help us do this, we have ethos statements which form the guiding principles by which we make decisions and deliver our activity.

Theatre Bristol Ethos Statements

- *When you share knowledge, everyone gets better*
- *Be personal. It takes time, but it makes for the best relationship*
- *It is essential to hold a space for uncertainty and for imagining alternative possibilities.*
- *Be honest about subjectivity: subjectivity is valuable because it leads you to what you care most about.*
- *We must cultivate a diverse pool of decision-makers: so that there is more than one subjectivity at play.*
- *Good ideas come from unexpected places*
- *Be alive to inspiration*
- *The artists own the work*
- *Art makes the world a better place*
- *Be committed to the long term – on behalf of ourselves and those we work with*

We want to encourage a non-hierarchical network culture, built on the principle that sharing knowledge makes everyone better. Gavin Stride, Director of Farnham Maltings talks about a good collaboration as being one where you want your collaborator to get more from the partnership than you do. It is this type of forward-thinking generosity that Theatre Bristol wants to encourage.

10 Years In: Theatre Bristol in 2015

Since our launch in 2005, Theatre Bristol’s approach has been to listen and respond to the needs of Bristol’s theatre ecology, testing new approaches and taking risks on behalf of the sector in order to make the sector stronger. In this way, Theatre Bristol has become a core part of the infrastructure of Bristol’s theatre industry – or as one artist put it: “you’re like a piece of software that everyone uses now.”

We have come a long way over these last 10 years. We became a Bristol City Council Key Arts Provider and an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation in 2012. Theatre Bristol incorporated as a Company Limited by Guarantee in 2009 and now has a committed Board of 7 Directors. We have a staff team of 5 permanent part-time producers, and we regularly employ associate producers and artists on a project-by-project basis. We are a leader in the field of independent artist and producer development and we are regularly consulted on our model of community building and producer/artist development approaches, most recently (since 2012) by organisations including the British Council, Arts Council England, Chapter Arts Centre, Encounters short film festival, the Australia Council, Korea Arts Management Service and Bios (Athens).

Over the last 10 years, TB has deployed an approach of generous (non-territorial, non-aggressively branded) leadership, which has been nicknamed “maverick invisibility” by

artists. The enormous value of this approach has been in allowing our community to trust and embrace our support without fear of being subsumed under another agenda. The downside of this maverick invisibility has been that our influence and leadership has been fairly invisible to people we are not already working with. The perception is that TB is largely a “service provider” rather than a leader or change-maker.

This has limited our ability to have influence more widely and has made it extremely hard to make our case to funders and other potential partners with whom we do not already have a relationship. In a climate of dwindling public funds for theatre, where there is hugely increased competition for private and other funds, we have to step up TB's visible leadership.

[2017 update:](#) In January 2017 we implemented a new leadership structure to make roles more outward-facing, give greater clarity internally & externally & put artist leadership in the senior team. Our team is:

Board of 6 non-exec Directors holding overall responsibility for the company

CEO: leadership, governance & partnership development

Director of Research (p/t, flexible): a role explicitly for an artist to lead on research, analysis & distribution

Director of Business Development (p/t): focusing on new business models for TB & the sector

Administrator (p/t)

Artist Support Associates (p/t, fixed term) (2 increasing to 4 in March 2017)

And thinking more broadly, digital tools and social media have transformed how the theatre community shares information and enables peer training. TB doesn't need to duplicate the support and information that is now accessible through increased connectivity. This is an opportunity to refocus more of our producers' time away from purely responsive artist support and more towards analysing our sector knowledge and sharing our recommendations, provocations and calls to action in a way that can be accessed by and useful to more people than it is at the moment.

[2017 Update:](#) From January 2017, with the creation of the Director of Research post, we will focus on improving our data collection and research methods which will enable us to test the new ideas that we believe have the potential to make large-scale change.

We recognise that our openness and ear to the ground is key to our buy-in; and that our willingness to be responsive, to meet other people's agendas is crucial to our value. We don't believe this stepping up has to change our ethos or even our commitment to bespoke support for artists and producers. Rather we want to share the value of our accumulated knowledge and understanding better and more widely.

10 Years In: The Bristol Context

Over the last 10 years, the live performance scene in Bristol has changed beyond recognition. For example: Bristol Old Vic has become an important commissioner of new work by local artists; Tobacco Factory Theatres now has two well equipped ([2017: dropped to 1, 1 pending](#)) performance spaces for the programme it presents, produces and tours; there are numerous independent groups of people creating venues and festivals e.g. Ausform and The Wardrobe Theatre; organisations such as Theatre Bristol, In Between Time and MAYK are supported as part of the ACE National Portfolio; the Pervasive Media Studio has artists from all disciplines exploring digital innovation within their practice; and artist-led collectives such as Residence and Puppet

Place have their own independent relationships with such major cultural bodies as the British Council.

Nationally, Bristol is perceived as a hotbed of exciting new work, with numerous high profile companies touring nationally and internationally from their Bristol base. Professional artists and producers regularly move to Bristol from other cities. There are over 600 (2017: over 1000) - practitioners listed on the theatrebristol.net directory with over 200 new directory profiles created in 2014 (2017: 140 in new profiles in 2016). The challenge is to make sure that Bristol's theatre infrastructure is robust enough to enable these artists and producers with strong track records, to make Bristol the home from which they create work that speaks to audiences locally and globally.

Bristol's cultural identity is distinctive and associated with innovation, environmental awareness, alternative ways of living, and independence. Bristol City Council and Bristol's Elected Mayor acknowledge the economic and social value of culture; and creative and media are key industries identified for development by the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership. (2017: the election of a new Mayor of Bristol facing a budget deficit has meant proposed cuts to the Culture budget and challenges for the sector)

Of course, these strengths and opportunities come alongside major challenges, both specific to Bristol and part of the wider world context. Global recession has put a strain on private and public funds, with significantly reduced public spending on the arts. Diminished subsidy threatens to make the arts even less accessible to poorer and marginalised communities. The political push towards philanthropy makes a disproportionate challenge to small organisations and individual artists. The prevailing rhetoric around the value of art is increasingly limited to economic return.

Looking more specifically at Bristol, our theatre ecology faces many key local challenges, including:

- Lack of well-equipped rehearsal and creation space in the city that artists can access.
- Lack of range of professional presentation venues for the range of high quality work touring in and out of Bristol
- Loss of Bristol City Council's "Capacity" programme which made unused spaces accessible to artists under temporary license.
- The critical mass of work being made and presented in the city makes fundraising hugely competitive in terms of ACE GFA funds, trusts and foundations, and individual giving.
- An over-reliance on Bristol Old Vic's Ferment programme for commissioning money
- Rising living costs make Bristol increasingly unaffordable for artists at a time when commission and touring fees are on the decline nationally.
- Black, minority ethnic and disabled people are still underrepresented in Bristol's arts leadership and programmes.
- Lack of development support to help artists move from small to mid-scale theatre-making
- Bad public transport in the city has concentrated arts activity near the city centre, making it harder to broaden audiences.
- Shortage of highly skilled technicians, designers, production managers based locally

This is the context in which we work, and Theatre Bristol can't address all these challenges alone. In some cases, our role will be to encourage organisations to share

resources better; or help artists find ways to run their own buildings; or make partnerships with producers outside Bristol who *are* helping artists move from small to mid-scale.

Theatre Bristol has never looked solely to institutions to make change. We believe that good ideas can come from unexpected places. We will continue to empower and help people with a can-do attitude to make change for the sector, both independently and in partnership

10 Years Forward: Our goals

With this context and our purpose in mind, Theatre Bristol will focus its work towards these 3 goals:

1) Brilliant work being made and experienced in Bristol – encouraging artists to grow their own distinctive voice; developing world-class skills; encouraging innovation through collaboration and creative challenge; supporting programmers to bring inspiring theatre to Bristol, helping artists to access the practical resource to realise the full potential of their vision.

2) Greater equality in the theatre industry – through designing, demonstrating and sharing good practice; testing out ways to flatten hierarchies and do things differently so that we open up pathways for marginalised or disempowered groups to have voice and participate in the industry; working with artists to create theatre that speaks and is accessible to a more diverse audience.

3) Resilient artists who can support lives, families and careers – developing sustainable creative business models with an eye to the long-term; developing local/national/international networks of skilled independent producers who can become part of an adaptable and shared infrastructure for independent artists; empowering and enabling independent artists and producers to inform policy and practice of larger organisations and institutions; identifying and championing leaders from within the sector who can inspire others and make stuff happen.

How we will get there: Action

We have to ask: where do we really want to make change and how can Theatre Bristol make things better? How are we going to support artists in a post-austerity landscape?

Theatre Bristol's responsibility as an NPO is to lead this conversation about how we as a sector support artists better. We have to champion artists as people who make our society stronger. We need our theatre industry to be influenced by people with different experiences. We need people without privilege to believe the possibility of making a living as an artist. We need more people to feel like they can be artists on their own terms. We need more people to feel able to take risks to make progress, even when there is a chance those attempts might fail.

What we will do

- Help artists create distinctive, visionary work for audiences through bespoke advice sessions, critical feedback and where appropriate, direct producing.

- Protect a space for radical thinking on behalf of the sector
- Research, model and publish good practice
- Encourage strategic partnerships and collaboration between organisations to spread access to resources e.g. via co-commissioning, via targeted support for dance artists
- Create high quality online resources for the theatre community through a redeveloped website: theatrebristol.net
- Ongoing and extended community-building – facilitating peer networks and broadening access to professional networks, actively court people who do not already engage with us
- Develop mobile and adaptable business models for independents, notably for mid-career artists and producers with strong track records
- Identify and develop leaders within and outside our organisation
- Make new partnerships – diversifying those who invest
- Champion Bristol's theatre community within and beyond the city.
- [Share our power, platforms & resources to give visibility & profile to independents e.g. as 'TB Agents' who receive bursaries to participate in conferences & networks with/instead of TB staff \(January 17 update\)](#)

TB already works like a think tank on behalf of the theatre sector. Over the coming years we will make that thinking more visible and accessible by publishing and sharing that thinking more widely.

~~Update 2016: As part of this, we will undertake 3 long-term researches responding to our 3 key goals, which will culminate in a useful, published resource for the sector by the end of 3 years. These umbrella researches will be informed by all our activity, including self-contained projects and programmes, which will have their own value and outputs.~~

How we will do it: our processes

“New ways of doing things emerge in messy ways, brought about through some combination of deliberate action and opportunistic adaptation in the light of circumstances... Entrepreneurship is hard and most attempts to do new things fail.” Bill Sharpe, *Three Horizons: The Patterning of Hope*.

Theatre Bristol fosters innovation. This means our processes are geared towards holding this radical or “messy” space in which new things can emerge from and for the sector. Our processes are about improving the quality of the conversation that our community has about where we are and how we move forward meaningfully. We hold a radical space within which multiple stories can be told and everyone's voices can be heard (not just those with power and privilege)

“One of the best discoveries in science was the scientific journal – a place for people to disagree” (Bill Sharpe, seminar at Theatre Bristol)

The sophistication of our sector knowledge comes from using processes that prioritise conversation, listening, generosity, openness, critical interrogation, and connecting people. These processes form the backbone of our activity.

- One-to-one conversation – listening, asking questions, exploring solutions with an understanding that artists and producers need professional support throughout their careers

- Group conversation – open space, match events, group consultation, partnership working
- Sharing our office and meeting room space
- TB Team conversation
- Online community
- Seeing and talking about work both in and beyond Bristol and the UK
- Learning about the landscape from inside and beyond Bristol and the UK
- Doing analysis and making provocation
- Documenting, publishing and publicising our work
- Sharing ‘trade secrets’ through blogs and downloadable online resources
- Training and skills development
- Strategic projects design, fundraising and delivery*
- Long-term research on behalf of the sector
- Good management of the organisation

* We will take a research approach to projects so that we can develop new learning for the sector as well as just getting the job done well. As an example, our 2015-16 Mayfest/TB co-commission seeks to produce an excellent piece of new theatre, but also allows us to ask “how can we get more diverse voices in the Mayfest programme?” and share what we learn from that experience with the sector.

Mechanisms for openness

To strengthen our sector overview, we need to make Theatre Bristol’s activity as open and accessible as possible. Our key mechanisms for openness are:

- Regular Open Office events
- Keeping tb.net free to use
- Seeing as much work as possible by artists who are new to us
- Publishing more of our research and advice online
- Actively seeking connections with groups who are not already engaging

Measuring the value of what we do

Our processes are dialogue-heavy, which allows us to regularly hear informal feedback on the value of our work. We will also formally evaluate our activity by assessing:

Who we engage with – through meetings, events, website, artists we commission, TB writers, people who download publications/toolkits

- how many people we engage with (numerical statistics)
- who they are (analysis of monitoring data)

What we produce – publications, toolkits (written/video/whatever), events, commissions

- how many products we create (numerical statistics)
- quality and value (gathering and analysis of feedback; cost-benefit analysis where appropriate)

We have set out targets for all our activity in our SMART Activity Plan (Appendix 1).

2015-17: NEW THINKING

In 2015 (our 10th anniversary year), working with business coach Stephen Wilson, and our Board (including an Away Day), we've been plotting better ways to get more power, opportunity, knowledge, good practice and resource out into the independent sector.

We now have two superb artists doing one day a week each of artist support work for 11 months; in March 2017 this will increase to 4. We want to better embed artist support in the sector, to acknowledge that artists are often the best people to support each other and to therefore pay them to do it, and to help sustain artists' careers by offering a bit of stability.

In 2016 we continued this thinking with a view to visibly position artists as leaders, with our Director of Research post created specifically for a practicing artist.

Moving forward into 2017-18 we will continue to:

- Empower artists as leaders & authors of change in all sections of society, including by employing practicing artists on our core team
- Promote open, participatory & peer-driven leadership e.g. highlighting independents & collectives as sources of knowledge & power
- Share our power, platforms & resources to give visibility & profile to independents e.g. as 'TB Agents' who receive bursaries to participate in conferences & networks with/instead of TB staff
- Champion multiplicity, resisting the idea of one view or correct answer to a problem. We inhabit a space of uncertainty & complexity, testing hypotheses & feeding our findings back to the sector.

All of this develops a sector that participates in its own support and we use intelligence gained from our artist support, events & staff engagement across the sector to design interventions that trial new ways of working, which can then be shared

How We Will Be Effective: Working Through Our People

All our staff work part-time for TB. Our experience outside TB as practicing artists, producers and consultants informs TB's understanding of the theatre ecology. We are ambassadors for TB in everything we do.

As a team, we are committed, enthusiastic and highly experienced. Our vision and ethos statements underpin what we do and how we work.

Roles and structure

The team	Current role	Priorities 2017 - 2018
Board of Directors	Holding overall responsibility for the company	Recruitment in line with our Diversity Action Plan
CEO Permanent role Full time from April 2017 (4 days Jan-April)	Setting the tone and culture of the organisation, giving high quality support to team, analysing and making decisions, seeing into the future for the company (fundraising and development)	Position TB better, partnership development

Director of Business Development Permanent role 3.5 days p/w	New business models for TB & the sector Managing the smooth running of the company	Diversifying Income With CEO and Upstarter (below) test ways of growing the ASA model to generate income
Director of Research Permanent role 3 days p/w	Role explicitly for an artist to lead on research, analysis & distribution	Plan areas of research for the next 12-18 month, partnership building
2 ASAs increasing to 4 in March 2017 11 month fixed term contracts	Leading on bespoke artist support programme	Strengthening the community, distributed artist support.
Dance Producer Managed and hosted by TB, but funded independently	Developing the professional dance community in Bristol	End of funding. Dance key priority for Co-Director Katie Keeler. From Jan 2016 CEO leading
Administrator Permanent role 3 days p/w	Supporting the team with administration, marketing and website management. Project managing	
Business Development Support	Test how we can capitalise on our artist support expertise nationally with a model that also offers employment for ASA alumni as trainers	Working with business incubator Upstarter

Management Processes

We are a small team, working with limited time, money or practical resource. In order to be effective, and avoid staff burnout, we need to make good decisions about how we manage and prioritise our work. Part of Theatre Bristol's value is in being able to respond to the needs of individuals and the sector as they arise. We will ask the following questions as a YES/NO mechanism to help us prioritise how we respond to need and opportunity:

- Does this activity serve one of our 3 key objectives?
- Is TB the best organisation to do this?
- What can I learn from this activity that would be useful to share internally and externally?
- Am I personally interested in working on this?

We use regular team meetings, one-to-one staff supervision and quarterly Board meetings to analyse need, share ideas, make decisions, iterate value, challenge and support each other.

Professional Development

The quality and ability of our staff is crucial to TB's effectiveness. We believe that personal and professional growth are interlinked and want to support the personal growth goals of our staff.

2017 Update: All staff have a mandate to lead on their areas of responsibility, supported by their line manager. Senior staff are supported by designated board members to monitor capacity, capability & identify areas for development, and management consultant Stephen Wilson donates 4 coaching days to the senior team per year

As part of the staff restructure the Executive team have had an opportunity to focus on new goals and from 2017 the board will support the development of these goals.

In addition, each member of staff has a yearly professional development budget, which they can spend on training and development

Evolving roles and succession planning

Because the work we do at TB responds to the needs of the theatre sector and often tests out new ways of working which might strengthen the theatre sector, it's vital that flexibility remains at the heart of how we operate. This flexibility is also fundamental to allowing our staff team to stretch and grow professionally, keeping our turnover down and growing expertise within the organisation.

We have developed systems for sharing knowledge within the team so as not to become too dependent on key personnel. Staff capacity and succession planning is detailed in our risk assessment (with named Board members holding responsibility) and is reviewed quarterly by the staff and Board.

TB is driven by the individuals in our staff team. Personal passion and curiosity are important in the arts and we want to encourage a sense of personal commitment and responsibility from our team.

Funding our activity

We believe there remains a strong moral case for public subsidy of Theatre Bristol because:

- Our strength is in our independence – we are not venue controlled or artist controlled.
- Our stakeholders need us most when they have the least money to pay for us

But we recognise that it is unrealistic to rely too heavily on public subsidy in the current economic climate. We must draw additional investment from other sources and partnerships. This will increase resources for the sector and create opportunities for Theatre Bristol and those we work with. It will make us all more robust. We have written fundraising targets into our yearly budgets.

We have created a Fundraising Strategy which will strengthen our position from which to ask for investment and earn income.

We currently do not have staff capacity to fundraise at the level we want to. As part of our fundraising strategy we will employ a specialist to write a series of bids to targeted trusts and foundations.

We must be honest and transparent about the true cost of our support and encourage people to acknowledge its value in whatever way they are able to. That said, we are especially mindful of the fact that our core constituents – artists – need us most when they are least able to pay for us. We must carefully assess how we balance our free offer with any chargeable service in order that we do not undermine our core beliefs of openness and generosity or our commitment to broadening who we engage with.

We will monitor and, if necessary, adjust our fundraising targets quarterly.