



Founding Artistic Director of the Black Theatre Company at The District Theatre

The District Theatre (TDT), a supporting organization of Indianapolis Foundation and Central Indiana Community Foundation (CICF), seeks an innovative, collaborative visionary to serve as the Founding Artistic Director of a Black professional Equity theatre. The mission of The District Theatre (TDT) is to enrich and strengthen our community by presenting, supporting, and amplifying the voices of performing artists, particularly those who represent the diversity of the human experience.

The top priority of The District Theatre is to help resource the founding and sustainability of a Black professional Equity theatre in residence at TDT, and also support the Black theatre ecosystem in Indianapolis. TDT has spent the last three years exploring opportunities, fund raising to ensure financial stability and engaging the Black arts community and is well-positioned to launch a national search to identify the Founding Artistic Director who will provide the vision for a Black professional Equity theatre company in Indianapolis, Indiana. Ultimately, the Black theatre company will produce 3 productions in the first year, increasing to a total of 4 productions each year. Other companies and productions will also be producing in The District Theatre, but priority in scheduling will be given to the Black professional Equity theatre company.

To ensure a successful launching of a Black professional equity theatre, TDT has engaged in substantial fundraising enabling the Founding Artistic Director ample time to plan and build an exciting program, engage the local arts and philanthropic communities, and be positioned to continue the friend-making necessary for long-term success and sustainability. As of May 1, 2023, The District Theatre has raised more than half of the \$2 million goal that will provide the Founding Artistic Director with funding for the first four seasons with annual budgets averaging \$500,000 per season for the first four seasons. The majority of the money made through tickets sales and annual fundraising during those first

four seasons can be used to produce future seasons. The District Theatre will also provide the venue at no cost for those first four seasons and provide other in-kind support.

The Founding Artistic Director will hire and work closely with a General Manager to develop annual program budgets and other activities related to establishing a successful theatre company. We are looking for an experienced, enthusiastic, and innovative Founding Artistic Director who will create the identity of this new adventure.

Black Professional Equity Theatre vision

TDT believes that in a city where the population is nearing 30% Black, one way to increase racial equity is to change the narrative about Black history and culture by centering Black playwrights and artists. The more the better. TDT believes it is time for Black theatre artists to have more professional opportunities and more attention paid to their stories as curated and told by Black artists. TDT will be the home of this new Black professional equity theatre company offering permanent performing space with two theatres in one location in a thriving downtown cultural district.

Primary Responsibilities of the Founding Artistic Director

- Identifying and successfully producing theatre that tells the story of the Black experience
- Hiring and supervising directors, performers, set designers, stage managers, etc.
- Regularly evaluating personnel and productions with an eye toward excellence
- Developing budgets, with assistance of General Manager
- Partnering with the Black theatre company's General Manager and Board of Directors in fundraising to ensure the continued success of the Black theatre company
- Serving as The Black Equity theatre's spokesperson, sharing the artistic vision and mission of the organization with constituents, donors, community members and the arts community
- Establishing strong relationships within the Black arts movement by attending productions, participating on community boards/committees and supporting other Black artists and companies throughout the city
- Providing regular reports to the Black theatre company board

Successful Applicants Will Bring:

- A visionary spirit and ability to select Black productions that engage, entertain and tell the story of Black life from a Black perspective.
- The capacity to utilize Black cultural work to confront and interrupt white supremacist valuations of what theatre and performance should entail
- Significant theatre experience in one or more of the following areas (producing, directing, acting, writing, arts marketing, organizational management with theatre experience).
- Understanding of the historical framing which created and sustains resistance-based activity such as the Black Arts Movement; the revolutionary potential of Black theatre and the myriad ways art works as advocacy within society.

- Administrative, management, financial and people skills
- Excellent communication and management skills and a willingness to serve as a transparent leader.
- Knowledge of and passion for the Black experience, history, literature, culture and expression with all of its complexities.
- Experience in successful friend- and fundraising campaigns
- A willingness and ability to build diverse external relationships and collaborate with members of the Black arts community, locally and nationally.
- Excellent leadership and planning skills
- Ability to support/mentor personnel
- Willingness to help build and participate in the Black theatre board

The District Theatre History

The District Theatre began operations in 2017. Prior to its creation, its home on Massachusetts Avenue was the home of Theatre on the Square, or “TOTS”. It was the brainchild of visionary Ron Spencer, operating first in the Fountain Square Cultural District in 1988 and moving to its final home on Mass Ave in 1993. Over its nearly 30 years in existence, TOTS played home to more than 250 theatre productions, some of which were world premier performances. TOTS focused on unique and original theatre, producing shows that fearlessly embraced marginalized communities, subject matters, and ideas, sometimes holding a mirror up to society that didn't always embrace diversity. It also became a touchstone for the LGBTQ community by presenting productions that gave voice to a culture when few other companies would do so. Ron Spencer retired in 2014, after which the organization struggled financially and closed its doors in 2017.

With a desire to ensure the space on Mass Ave was preserved as a theatrical venue and important cultural hub in the community, Central Indiana Community Foundation (CICF) took over the building, and the Indianapolis Foundation, a CICF affiliate invested \$250,000 in repairs and upgrades, and recruited a founding Board of directors who incorporated The District Theatre as a new 501(c)(3) and supporting organization of CICF known as The District Theatre. The new leadership enshrined in The District Theatre’s mission a commitment to preserving the bold, status quo-challenging, and fearlessly diverse history of TOTS. In furtherance of that mission, The District Theatre has adopted a strategic focus of helping resource and incubate new professional resident equity theatre companies, beginning with a Black resident professional equity company.

In 2018, The District Theatre issued an RFP to run the day-to-day operations while the Board worked on creating a strategic plan. The IndyFringe Festival was selected to operate the theatre under a three-year contract (2018-2020). In 2021, The District Theatre resumed management due to the financial implications of COVID-19. The theatre is managed by Pauline Moffat, former President and CEO of IndyFringe.

The theatre was resilient in its efforts during the pandemic, thanks in part to the support of a \$20,000 grant from the Indy Arts and Culture Restart & Resilience Fund (made possible by Lilly Endowment Inc) and over \$60,000 from the Shuttered Venue federal grant program. To encourage audiences to return to theater, TDT built an 80-seat outdoor stage and opened the OutBack Theatre in May 2021. A mix of indoor and outdoor shows continued until October 2021 when all shows returned to The Cabaret and Mainstage. Additional grants totaling \$160,000.00 were obtained to restore the façade of the theatre and upgrade Mainstage.

The District Theatre Guiding Values

With an increasingly and intentionally diverse Board of Directors, TDT believes:

- in the power of expressive performance to educate and foster shared appreciation for the experiences and the humanity of all people.
- in the importance of supporting and nurturing artists who are finding and refining their voices, particularly those exploring the experiences of diverse and under-represented communities.
- that vibrant and welcoming performing arts venues are essential to thriving communities.

Much of TDT's planning has been guided by the words of Pulitzer and Tony-Award recipient August Wilson on the Role of Black Theatre:

To correct distortions of Black history
To reclaim a collective Black mindset
To restore Black spirits crushed by white oppressors
To rebuild Black dignity and self esteem
To state Black issues in vernacular terms
To provide a venue and source of income for Black talent
To showcase Black tastes, values, and autonomy
To present characters and stories that uplift the Black self-image
To celebrate the endurance of a Black minority in an overwhelmingly white society
To legitimize Black ethics, pride and values in theatricals that are uniquely African American

We hope to find a Founding Artistic Director who will unashamedly embrace August Wilson's vision.

The starting salary for the Founding Artistic Director will be \$75,000 per year and a generous benefits package. Raises are built into the budget pro-forma beginning with the second full year of production.

Application Process

Please forward a cover letter, resume, reference list with contact information (email and telephone) to: director@indydistricttheatre.org

The committee **will begin reviewing applications in June 2023** with a start date for the **Founding Artistic Director in the fall of 2023, as negotiated.**

Just as The District Theatre has increased the presence of Black and Brown voices on its board, the search committee for the Founding Artistic Director is intentionally and unapologetically inclusive of the Black artistic community and TDT board members committed to the success of the Founding Artistic Director and the Black professional Equity theatre. IUPUI Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Dr. Karen Dace is TDT Vice Chair and chair of the Founding Artistic Director Search Committee.

Equal Opportunity Statement

The District Theatre is an equal opportunity employer that is committed to diversity and inclusion in the workplace. We prohibit discrimination and harassment of any kind based on race, color, sex, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, genetic information, pregnancy, or any other protected characteristic as outlined by federal, state or local laws.

This policy applies to all employment practices within The District Theatre including hiring, recruiting, promotion, termination, layoff, recall, leave of absence, compensation, benefits, training, and apprenticeship. The District Theatre Board makes hiring decisions based solely on qualifications, merit and business needs at the time.