

CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION GRANT PROPOSAL SUMMARY SHEET

Date April 5, 2024

Contact Information

Organization Name: Inis Nua Theatre Company
Address: 1700 Sansom Street, Suite 800
Philadelphia, PA 19103
Phone: 215-436-9006
Website: www.inisnuatheatre.org
Year Incorporated: 2005
FEIN: 20-2417990

ED/CEO Name: Kathryn MacMillan
Email: macmillan@inisnuatheatre.org

Board Chair Name: Anne Vogelmann
Board Chair Approval (check here):
Primary Contact Name: Patricia Toy
Email: toy@inisnuatheatre.org

Organization Information:

Field/s of Interest:

Arts, Culture & Humanities Environment/Animal Welfare Education
 Health Human Services Religion

Mission: Our mission is to produce contemporary, provocative plays from Ireland, England, Scotland, and Wales, which reflect those cultures' new identities in today's world.

Geographic Area Served (If not all of Chester County, specify primary Chester County regions served):

Philadelphia region including Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery Counties, New Jersey, Delaware

Describe Population Served & Annual Number of People Served:

Annual Budget \$496,330 2 # of Full-Time Equivalent Paid Staff
68 % of budget for program expenses 7 # of Board Volunteers
25 % of budget for administrative expenses 8 # of Active Non-Board Volunteers
07 % of budget for fundraising expenses 48 # of Volunteer Hours
100 % total

Top 3-5 funding sources: MKM Foundation, Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, William Penn Foundation, Wyncote Foundation, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts

Is this grant proposal for: Capacity Building or General Operating

If Capacity Building Proposal, the focus is:

Mission, Vision & Strategy Governance & Leadership Partnerships & Collaborations
 Fundraising, Development & Marketing Technology Other: _____

Grant Amount Requested from the Community Foundation: \$2,500

Proposal Summary: Inis Nua Theatre Company respectfully requests a grant for general operating funds in support of our 2024/25 season, which will include two mainstage productions, two Pop-up Plays in a Pub, and a free 3-play reading series. These are challenging times for theater nationwide shaped by compounding existential threats: rising expenses, earned revenue volatility, and funders' shifting priorities. Below is information supporting our request. Thank you so much for your consideration.

GRANT PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

Organization's Mission & Distinctiveness

Inis Nua, which translates to “new island” in Gaelic, is the only theatre company in the US with our unique mission: to produce contemporary, provocative plays from Ireland, England, Scotland, and Wales, which reflect those cultures' new identities in today's world. We see these plays not only as some of the best contemporary theatrical writing in the world, but also as a mirror that can reflect the issues facing our own city of Philadelphia today: economic and education inequities, changing communities, class and racial tension, gentrification, among other issues. Seeing our challenges reflected in the context of another culture can give us new insight into our own conflicts.

Brief History & Key Achievements

Inis Nua was founded in 2004 by Tom Reing (Artistic Director Emeritus) with just a \$1,200 budget to produce a show for the Philadelphia Fringe Festival, and Inis Nua would become a featured, popular Philly Fringe performer over the next 3 years. The quality of our work attracted funders and within about five years we grew to a mid-sized company with a strong reputation for excellence. In 2011, our 1st Off-Broadway transfer, the Pew-supported *Dublin by Lamplight*, won Best Ensemble at the 1st Irish Theatre Festival. In 2014 we received the prestigious June & Steve Wolfson Award for an Evolving Theatre Company, and that same year our work was recognized with 6 Nominations and 5 Barrymore Awards for Excellence in Theatre for *Midsummer (a play with songs)* including Best Overall Production of a Musical, Outstanding Musical Direction, Outstanding Production of a Musical, and Outstanding Lead Actress. We continued to grow our audience and receive accolades: our 2016 production of *The Radicalization of Bradley Manning* won a Barrymore Award for Outstanding Ensemble in a Play. Our 2018/19 season earned a total of 13 Barrymore nominations for our three mainstage productions - *The Monster in the Hall*, *Box Clever*, and *Untitled*. Since 2015 Inis Nua has been a partner at the Theatres at The Drake with lead tenant InterAct Theatre, and other resident partners Azuka, Simpatico, and PlayPenn. The Theatres at The Drake, a hub for new work with a 120-seat proscenium theatre and an 80-seat black box theatre, is an excellent example of resource-sharing among theatre companies.

Description of Key Initiatives

In September 2022, Inis Nua hired Kathryn KC MacMillan as the new Artistic Director, following the retirement of founder Tom Reing after eighteen seasons. In bringing KC on in this leadership role our vision and key initiative is to broaden the scope of our mission beyond plays from Ireland and the UK, in order to explore colonial legacy and post-colonialism and the impacts those cultures have had on the peoples they have colonized. Ireland and the UK are often wrongly perceived as homogeneous, white mono-cultures, although there is wider diversity than ever in their stories; this is what Inis Nua seeks to reveal. We believe this will create opportunities for Inis Nua to build relationships with a greater number of Philadelphians, including those who have settled here from formerly colonized regions of the Caribbean, Nigeria, West Africa, South Africa, and India, all of whom have significant cultural presence here in Philadelphia. We aim to chart a bolder course, believing now more than ever, theater companies like Inis Nua must make the strongest case we can that theater makes unique, vital contributions to our lives and our understanding of one another.

As we enter our third decade, our broader, bolder vision is reflected in our upcoming season. We will open our 2024/25 season in September with an exciting new adaptation of John M. Synge's acclaimed 1908 play *The Playboy Of The Western World*, adapted by beloved Irish author Roddy Doyle and Nigerian playwright Bisi Adigun. Set among gang families in modern Dublin, this adaptation reimagines outsider

Christy Mahon as Nigerian asylum-seeker Christopher Malomo; the shift makes the play feel radically new, drawing attention to urgent issues of immigration by highlighting challenges faced by African immigrants moving into tight-knit, racially homogenous communities like Dublin. Inis Nua received a major project grant from the Pew Center for Arts & Heritage for this project. This show will be a much larger production than we usually produce—the cast of 11 will be the largest ensemble we have ever hired, including four AEA cast and stage manager, and two Nigerian actors with the lived experience of the play's Nigerian characters. This is vital to the integrity of our production centering Nigerian immigrant experiences.

Goals, Specific Needs & Issues to be Addressed

Our overall objectives are to produce an exciting season of great theatre, engage theatre artists in meaningful work, attract audiences back to the theatre, and offer enriching experiences to audiences.

Main Goals - to increase audiences by 20% next fiscal year to meet or exceed our pre-pandemic subscriptions and single ticket sales. We plan to accomplish this with an increase in our marketing budget and smarter, more robust marketing.

In addition to the specific goal to increase audiences, we will continue to address the ongoing need for more diversity, equity, and inclusion within our organization as described below.

-Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion in Hiring - Over the past six seasons, it has been an objective of our organization to become more diverse and equitable in our staff and board, the artists we engage, the work we produce, audiences we reach, and communities we serve. This objective continues to be an important part of our company's work on an ongoing basis. It is a priority to achieve racial parity in who we present onstage and who is behind the scenes, to engage and hire BIPOC artists, designers, and production teams. Over the course of the last several years we have made significant progress, increasing our hiring of BIPOC artists in these areas by more than 50%. Our goal is to continue to increase our hiring of BIPOC artists, designers, and production staff for all of our productions for the 2024/25 season series.

-Diversity in our Audiences - With our production of *The Playboy of the Western World* next season, in particular, we aim to diversify the audiences we seek to reach and expand perceptions, particularly white audiences', of who is Irish— and who is American. We want to expand perceptions of who is included when we speak of Ireland and the UK; including immigrant communities and victims of colonialism's legacy. We want the West African audiences of Philadelphia to recognize their experience within the context of this production, through the voices of its Nigerian characters. The ultimate impact we aim for, through the appealing tools of comedy, is for audiences to gain understanding and insight into other cultures that they have not encountered in a meaningful way, whether Irish or Nigerian or American, while sharing space with them in our audience. Our goal is to develop a relationship with Philadelphia's Nigerian and African communities and meaningfully sustain that relationship with future projects.

-Making Theatre Accessible - Our theatre is free of physical barriers, it is fully wheelchair accessible and ADA compliant, and all restrooms are single occupancy, gender neutral. We have also been committed to making our theatre more accessible to individuals whose opportunities to experience theatre are limited by economic barriers. We offer \$2.00 tickets to our shows through the ACCESS Program, a program of Art-Reach, Philadelphia's arts advocacy organization for audiences and artists with disabilities. With an ACCESS card an individual can purchase up to four \$2.00 tickets. We will continue our participation in the ACCESS Program with Art-Reach next season.

How Impact & Results Will Be Demonstrated

Subscriptions and ticket sales will be tracked through our ticketing system. We expect more robust and strategic marketing and targeted outreach to broader communities will result in an increase in ticket sales and subscriptions.

-Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion in Hiring - Hiring of BIPOC artists, designers, and production staff will be documented for each of our productions with the goal of increasing the number of BIPOC hired over the number hired last season.

-Diversity in our Audiences - This goal will be difficult to measure as we do not typically collect any demographic data from our audience members. However, for our production of *The Playboy of the Western World* we plan to reach out to a number of Nigerian and African organizations in the Philadelphia region, as well as colleges and universities for potential group ticket sales. Any group sales we may book through these channels would possibly give us some demographic data.

-Making Theatre Accessible - As stated above, ticket sales for each of our shows throughout the season are tracked through our ticketing platform. This data includes the number of ACCESS tickets sold so we will have information on the number of ACCESS tickets for the season.

Why It's Important to Fund Now

Theatre, and arts & culture in general, can have a great impact on people's lives and communities. Experiencing theatre is an opportunity to experience diverse perspectives. Theatre is an important art form that should be available to all. As stated in our Proposal Summary, these are challenging times for the theater industry nationwide. These challenges are shaped by compounding existential threats: rising expenses, earned revenue volatility, funders' shifting priorities. After two years in which season planning and budgeting was grievously affected, theater still remains more challenging and more expensive to produce: supply chain issues have driven costs up, alongside testing protocols, the need for standbys and understudies, and the imperative for more substantial artistic pay. The income side is likewise uncertain: audience attendance has not returned to pre-pandemic levels and may never do so. Audience behavior has changed - there is an increase in last minute buying making planning more difficult, and several foundations have retooled their criteria and giving patterns. In short, the pandemic has affected and continues to affect every aspect of nonprofit theater operations. These external factors complicate our ability to maintain current operations year-to-year. A grant from Chester County Community Foundation in support of our general operating expenses for FY 24/25 would help Inis Nua meet some of our needs for the year and help us continue to bring engaging theatre to Philadelphia audiences.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Copy of 501 (c) (3) federal tax-exempt letter
2. List of Board of Directors, with their affiliations
3. Audited FY23 Annual Report & Financial Statement
4. Itemized organizational operating Budget vs Actuals for completed FY23 and for FY24 July 2023 - March 2024.
5. Strategic Plan - Inis Nua does not currently have a strategic plan. Our Board of Directors is preparing to develop a strategic plan in FY25 and has selected a consultant to work with on this.