



IMPACT100 TRAVERSE CITY

2022 ARTS & CULTURE FINALIST: FRIENDS OF THE GARDEN THEATER (THE GARDEN THEATER)

INITIATIVE: Performing Arts Project

OVERVIEW OF INITIATIVE – IN THE APPLICANT’S WORDS

The Garden Theater seeks an Impact100 Grant to fund their Performing Arts Project. This will allow for the theater to offer a wider variety of artistic and educational performances to substantially strengthen the cultural richness in Northern Michigan, further community bonding, and promote local prosperity. The proposed project includes entirely new lighting, rigging, video, and sound systems for the theater as well as improvements to the theater’s accessibility and the investment of venue necessities. These enhancements will transform the Garden Theater into a fully functioning multipurpose venue and community center. By mitigating ongoing equipment rental expenses and, therefore, lessening ticket costs, it will give greater access to all community members seeking a culturally fulfilling experience and to various performers seeking an audience.

The following sections contain certain key information from the application, as written by the applicant.

While detailed financial information has not been provided here due to its confidential nature, each applicant submitted an initiative budget and supporting financial documents as part of their application. Each proposed initiative and the supporting financial documentation has undergone a thorough financial review by our Financial Review Committee (FRC) and the initiatives proposed by our finalists have met our standards for moving forward.

ORGANIZATION’S VISION STATEMENT

Our vision is that the Garden Theater will act as a gathering space, using film, music and private events to enhance our community and vitality.

ORGANIZATION’S MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Friends of The Garden Theater is to use our historic theater to build a stronger community.

DESCRIPTION OF ORGANIZATION AND ITS HISTORY

The Garden Theater has become a cornerstone of the Benzie County community and beyond since its opening in 1924. More than just a movie house, the theater has a history and tradition of bringing new ideas, experiences, and energy to downtown Frankfort. By bringing year-round, diverse entertainment, personal enrichment, and providing a community gathering space, The Garden Theater enhances the lives of all stakeholders and participants through its events and offerings.

The 501(c)3, The Friends of The Garden Theater, was formed in 2018 to acquire the theater and strengthen efforts for its restoration and longevity. The Friends are devoted to keeping this historic movie house sustainable, while simultaneously preserving its iconic character and improving the facilities for all patrons to access and enjoy. The Friends have been committed to maintaining this structure as a multipurpose gathering space for locals and visitors alike. The theater is an anchoring institution of Frankfort's Main Street. The value to our citizens and local businesses cannot be overlooked.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF INITIATIVE

The Garden Theater seeks an Impact100 Traverse City Grant to help fund the Performing Arts Project which will allow for the theater to offer a wider variety of artistic and educational performances to substantially strengthen the cultural richness in Benzie County and beyond. The proposed project includes entirely new lighting, rigging, video, and sound systems for the theater as well as improvements to the theater's accessibility and the investment of venue necessities to mitigate ongoing rental costs. These enhancements will transform the Garden Theater into a fully functioning multipurpose venue and give greater access to performers seeking an audience and community members seeking a culturally fulfilling experience.

Since The Garden Theater has become a 501(c)3, there has been profound support from the community. It was essential to make the building structurally sound and safe for its patrons. After completing that, it is now the time to think about the future of The Garden. The Garden's outreach in the coming months includes projects with Traverse Symphony Orchestra, Interlochen Public Radio, Traverse City Dance Project, Cognition, Lakeside Shakespeare, Benzie Area Symphony Orchestra, University of Michigan and both local and international musicians. The Friends are working hard to respond to the demand from the community but are limited by the theater's resources. Theatrical productions are still not a possibility due to a lack of a proper rigging system. Full orchestra performances cannot exist without overhead lighting for the symphony members to read their music. Dance ensembles are currently required to bring in their own movable stage because The Garden's needs refinishing. And for every live performance, The Garden incurs an expense of at least \$1500 to rent lights, speakers, and furniture. The natural progression and phase two of The Friends' mission is to make the necessary upgrades to become a fully functioning performance venue.

In addition to the audio, visual and lighting plans, The Garden seeks to invest in a handicap accessible lift to the stage, and a loading door and dock to be constructed backstage. While The Garden is now fully ADA compliant for patrons, adding these last imperative features will grant full accessibility for artists as well.

Completing the Performing Arts Project will promote the longevity of the historic theater by being able to host more varying impactful events with a greater access to all community members due to lessened out of pocket expenses. Right now, The Garden can produce fewer events because of the high overhead costs. By mitigating these expenses, and with the installation of each of the aforementioned systems working seamlessly together, any level of performer can take to the stage with very minimal financial risk to the theater.

The Performing Arts Project is the natural evolution of The Garden. It is a step The Friends planned in the future, but given the overwhelming response from their patrons, the need necessitates sooner than expected. The Friends want to be able to host any organization and artform if there is a desire for it. Once the Performing Arts Project is completed, all of this would be possible for the community.

COMMUNITY TO BE SERVED

The Garden Theater is home to year-round residents of the region, summer homeowners, and vacationers that return year after year. For all, The Garden is a focal point in the community that so many cherish. A place for all to gather and share in the collective experience of moviegoing. Since the new nonprofit ownership, The Garden has become more than just a movie house. The Friends have focused on providing artistic and educational events as well as a space to be used by numerous organizations who otherwise would not have a venue for congregation.

The Friends aspire to continue The Garden's history of being accessible for all socio-economic classes in the area. Movie ticket pricing and concessions have not been increased in 14 years. The Performing Arts Project will continue the pursuit of an inclusive framework by expanding the access to experience art and at an affordable cost. With this initiative, The Friends strive to host more free events and keep ticketed events at a low price point allowing for attendance from the entirety of the local population.

NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY TO BE SERVED

There is a great separation of wealth in Benzie County and being as The Friends' mission is to promote community, they work hard to build a bridge from the differing socio-economic classes in the region. The Friends have found the best way to accomplish this is by hosting events from an inclusive standpoint. Since the reopening of The Garden in October 2021, The Friends have worked diligently to produce more events for the local community to share in a collective experience no matter the attendee's artistic depth, race, religion, age, gender identity or any other dividing factor.

Some of the most well attended events in the past nine months have been those that are free or minimal cost. The Garden has hosted a \$1 Family Movie Day once a month and the theater is packed with individuals and families from all over the county that can enjoy a film without financial burden or worry that their children might be disruptive. There have been several free events at the theater already and more in the coming months: Argentinian tango group QuinTango, Traverse City Orchestra's Swan Lake, Stories That Heal (a community performance and dialogue about mental health), and free movie screenings. All these events have been made possible by the Executive Director seeking out either sponsorships or grant money.

The Friends also are large proponents of intergenerational fraternizing. The median age of year-round Frankfort residents has long been over 50 years old. During the pandemic, many young families have migrated to the area. The Garden wants to unify the young and old, sharing in the delight of youth, and wisdom of age. Once again, focusing on an inclusive framework for all events, bridges these two different groups and builds a stronger sense of community.

The Performing Arts Project will continue this mission of strengthening the community by eliminating parameters that could prohibit an event from taking place, such as high overhead costs or inaccessibility.

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROPOSED INITIATIVE

Much of the Performing Arts Project is the purchase and installation of equipment with minimal construction. The Friends have set aside and plan to maintain a working capital for the regular maintenance of the new equipment and in the event that something would need to be replaced, have the funds to cover it.

There is little to no money to be made in a one screen movie theater. Production companies make it impossible for arthouse movie theaters to compete with multiplex theaters by only licensing new films for several weeks at a time. In Frankfort, after showing a film for a week, there is no audience left to attend the remaining weeks.

The previous owners of The Garden Theater got creative with how to sustain by introducing the Frankfort Film Festival. The Friends have followed this lead and with each year, it is more and more successful. The Frankfort Film Festival is what funds The Garden through the winter when attendance is low. Continuing with this model, The Friends will produce more varied events with the help of the Performing Arts Project. These musical performances, lectures, magic shows, community forums and more will help to sustain the theater during the ebbs and flows of a regular year of movies.