



Nova Scotia Theatre Sector Strategy



“Art helps us to understand what we have in common and where we differ, what we like and what offends us, what excites us and what leaves us cold. We come together around art without having to agree about it. Art helps to populate and energise an open public space for reflection, expression, empathy, dissent and disagreement.”

Peter Hewitt,

Chief Executive, Arts Council of England

NOVA SCOTIA
THEATRE SECTOR STRATEGY
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OVERVIEW

“Art can live under pressure, in repressive societies, but it cannot be prescribed. It thrives in open spaces where it has room to breathe, where people are free to explore. It is by nature resistant to instruction or targeting. The whole point of creativity, as with all forms of innovation, is that it is impossible to know the outcome in advance. This can at times run counter to the instinct of policy makers, who, in their keenness to uphold accountability, are inclined to detailed targets, leading inevitably to micro management and, at its worst, the stifling of initiative and innovation. I say to them relax, let go, entrust.”

Peter Hewitt,

Chief Executive, Arts Council of England

It might appear counterintuitive to preface a sector strategy document with a quote that, in effect, says that the nature of the creative process shouldn't be subject to strict accountability and detailed targeting. Specific targets are at the heart of strategic thinking. The reason for developing “a plan” is so that it can be implemented with the goal of realizing predicted outcomes. Why bother going to trouble of creating a Theatre Sector Strategy if “*the whole point of creativity, as with all forms of innovation, is that it is impossible to know the outcome in advance*”?

The reason for including this quote is simple. It is to remind us that even though we as a sector struggle developing concrete goals and objectives, ultimately we are talking about theatre. And theatre is art. And to be successful with any strategy we have to attempt to understand the conditions under which art is created. We must then try to insure that where these conditions exist they are healthy and vibrant, and where they don't exist they are created and fostered.

Creativity is the single most important asset necessary for the people of Nova Scotia as we move deeper into the twenty first century. Globalization, international trade, and improvements in technology place less importance on traditional geographical and cultural borders. It is vital that, in being conscious of this trend toward fewer borders, we work to understand and define ourselves and our values. The ability to think, to create, and to be innovative are the new tools of the twenty first century that will help us to stand out and thrive nationally and internationally. And it is through building participation in the arts, and specifically in theatre, that we will encourage the development of creative ability in all Nova Scotians.

It is with this in mind that Theatre Nova Scotia has embarked upon a project to create a comprehensive theatre sector strategy aimed at strengthening the sector as a whole, providing a focus for activities, determining a vision for the future. The Theatre Sector Strategy has set out concrete goals, objectives and initiatives to help the theatre

community move towards that vision. Theatre Nova Scotia was successful in attaining funds from the Canada Council's Flying Squad Program and the Province of Nova Scotia to assist in the development of this strategy.

It is the mandate of Theatre Nova Scotia to oversee and support all aspects of live theatre in the province. This includes the activities of individuals and organizations working in both the professional theatre and the community theatre. While it is recognized that the practice of community theatre is important to the overall health of the sector, given the resources available to us, the focus of the strategy is on the professional sector. However, there is no doubt that the successful implementation of the strategy will bring with it important benefits to everyone who participates in the practice and presentation of live theatre regardless of their level of engagement.

The last decade has seen significant growth in the number of professional theatre companies in Nova Scotia and a significant growth in the creation of original work. However the theatre community in Nova Scotia has always faced a number of challenges many of which tend to reoccur and often serve to destabilize the sector. While the talent pool of theatre artists is strong and varied, the "going down the road" syndrome often lures many of our younger artists away. Many of our established artists, who make their home in Nova Scotia, struggle to earn a living in an unpredictable work environment with a narrow range of employment possibilities. The lack of general managers and theatre administrators has historically been a problem for the sector, often forcing companies to hire inexperienced personnel and placing undue strain on senior administrators and artistic directors. And as competition for the "entertainment dollar" increases so too must the sophistication of our efforts to build audiences. It is no longer sufficient for theatre companies to expect to attract audiences by relying on the old standards of putting up a poster, placing an ad in the paper, and hoping the reviews are good. It is also true that the relationship with provincial government funding bodies has been strained as a result of an unclear provincial government funding policy and declining (in real terms) support for theatres.

In the process of preparing the strategy all of Nova Scotia's professional theatre companies and workers have had the opportunity for input. Data and opinions that were collected have been compiled by the consultant working with Theatre Nova Scotia on this project and then filtered through a committee formed for that specific purpose. Throughout the process information has been sent out to an extensive list of theatre contacts in the province to allow opportunities for input into the strategy. Several meetings of all interested parties were coordinated by Theatre Nova Scotia and the final strategy was approved at one such meeting on February 22, 2006.

MAKE UP OF NOVA SCOTIA'S THEATRE SECTOR

If you were to look at the theatre sector in Nova Scotia as a whole you would see a substantial amount of activity given the size of the Province. Theatre has rich history in Nova Scotia starting as far back as the strong performance traditions of the Mi'kmaq, to L'Escarbot's presentation of "Theatre de Neptune" at Annapolis Royal in 1606, to the presentation of farces at the 900 seat Strand Theatre in Halifax in the early part of the twentieth century, to present day offering of plays by Nova Scotian playwrights and productions from the world stage.

The development of the theatre that modern audiences are more familiar with in Nova Scotia has mirrored the development of theatre in the rest of the country. Early work by committed amateur theatres, the creation of the Canada Council in the 1950's, and subsequent creation of Neptune theatre in 1961 lay the ground work for the present theatre sector. As the Infrastructure around live theatre grew so did the interest and participation of the population. The 1960's saw more and more theatre courses offered at Dalhousie and other Universities (leading to the creation of a degree in Theatre Studies), and the seventies and eighties saw the emergence of companies like Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia, Ship's Company Theatre, and Mulgrave Road Theatre. This development continues right through to today.

Currently there are 20 professional theatre companies active in Nova Scotia. They range in size from large regional operating a full season of plays to small independent theatres working on a project to project basis. Three Nova Scotia theatres are touring companies committed to bringing original works across Nova Scotia, to other provinces in Canada and around the world. There are university theatre programs offered by Dalhousie University, Acadia University, St. Francis Xavier University, and Cape Breton University, as well as theatre schools operated by Neptune Theatre and Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia. There are two theatre service organizations (Theatre Nova Scotia and Playwrights Atlantic Resource Centre) and three commercial dinner theatres. As well there are 25 community theatres across the province. Canadian Actor's Equity Association reports that there are approximately 180 members (actors, directors, choreographers) in the Atlantic region the majority of who live in Nova Scotia. As well there are designers, technicians, stage managers and administrative personnel who play their own vital role in the sector.

A typical performance year would see the presentation of a wide variety of work that would include Broadway musicals, Shakespeare, international tours of puppet shows, new Nova Scotian plays, and experimental theatre. The Nova Scotia theatre sector has grown significantly over the last couple of decades. It has an evolving national and international reputation in theatre and the potential to establish itself as a leader and an innovator in terms of how theatre is created and presented.

Successful completion of this strategy will lead to a theatre sector that will:

- Be approximately fifty percent larger than it is now.
- Employ significantly more people over longer periods of time.
- Help the province attract the highly educated and skilled people that will be the key to economic growth in the information age.
- Produce those works of art that help define our culture for generations to come.

Completion of this plan comes at an opportune time for the theatre sector. The Government of Canada has recently announced its intention to double the funding to the primary source of federal government funding of the province's theatre companies, the Canada Council for the Arts. It is understood that this action has the support of all major federal political parties so, hopefully, the recent general election will not change this commitment.

As part of this strategy the theatre sector will be asking the Province of Nova Scotia to make a similar investment in the arts so that provincial organizations will be well placed to capture its fair share of the new federal government money to the arts (which could amount to as much as \$3.5 million more to Nova Scotian artists and organizations).

The great mystery is not that we should have been thrown down here at random between the profusion of matter and that of the stars; it is that from our very prison we should draw, from our own selves, images powerful enough to deny our nothingness.

André Malraux, Man's Fate (1933)

GOALS & TACTICS

Goals & Tactics for the Nova Scotia Theatre Sector Strategy have been organized into four separate areas: Financial, Infrastructure, Human Resource, and Long Term Development. Invariably there is a certain overlap in some of these areas (almost any activity has a financial component) so some elements are dealt with in multiple areas.

Financial

Financial resources for the theatre sector come from three areas – Earned Revenues (primarily ticket sales); Fund Raising (corporate sponsorships and donations, individual donations, special events) and Public Sector support (from all three levels of government). The financial related goals for the Theatre Sector Strategy are designed to improve the sector's performance in each of those areas.

The first goal in this section aims to increase ticket sales through various marketing initiatives.

GOAL 1

Increase overall attendance for Nova Scotia's professional theatres by at least 25% over the next five years.

Responsible: TNS Financial / Infrastructure Committee

Deadline: By 2009 -10

Measure: 25% increase in attendance over 2003/04

Tactics

- a) Improve marketing sophistication of theatre companies
 - i) Develop a more consistent approach to market intelligence. Improve knowledge of Nova Scotia audiences – current and potential.
 - ii) Develop & use scientific marketing tools to establish the best methods to grow audiences and make information on “best practices” available to the whole sector.
 - iii) Provide quality “arts focused” workshops and seminars to professional companies to help them understand and utilize potential marketing tools available
- b) Encourage cooperative marketing initiatives among theatre companies
- c) Encourage cooperation among theatre companies so that the scheduling of productions helps to optimize sales.
- d) Establish a small theatre marketing committee to address the specific marketing needs and problems of smaller theatre companies.
- e) Develop an incentive program(s) for repeat theatre attendees
- f) Encourage the development of a provincial funding program concentrating on two areas of marketing:
 - iv) Marketing for entire sector (marketing theatre in general and NS theatre in particular). Include research component for determining effectiveness of marketing activities.
 - v) Marketing for individual theatres
- g) Encourage the development of a provincial funding program centered on initiatives to enhance the quality of theatre products.

The most difficult thing in the world is to reveal yourself, to express what you have to. As an artist, I feel that we must try many things - but above all we must dare to fail. You must have the courage to be bad -- to be willing to risk everything to really express it all."

John Cassavetes

Fund Raising capacity of theatre companies in the province of Nova Scotia varies, largely according to size and location. While competition for charitable dollars is becoming more and more severe, this area of funding remains an important aspect of theatre revenues.

GOAL 2

Increase Private Sector Fund Raising for the sector by 30% over inflation in the next five years for companies smaller than \$300,000/year and by 10% over inflation in the next five years for companies over \$300,000/year.

Responsible: TNS Financial / Infrastructure Committee
Deadline: By 2009 -10
Measure: Meeting goal targets for revenues above 2003/04 Theatre Sector results

Tactics

- a) Develop annual fund raising seminars for theatre sector members
- b) Encourage cooperation among smaller theatres in order to enhance sponsorship benefits and special event prospects.
- c) Develop educational materials for the general public on the value, importance and need for giving to the arts & culture sector.

Grants and contributions from Nova Scotia's Cultural Affairs division are considerably lower as a percentage of total provincial revenues than they were just seven years ago. This development, along with the many new theatre companies competing for stagnating dollars, has put a significant strain on the sector.

We will be asking the provincial government to invest an additional \$750,000 each year over a five year period to assist Nova Scotia's Theatre Sector in its development and help it reach a more full potential. This money will also help leverage the province's share of the expected increase in Canada Council funding.

The Theatre Sector feels that most of its suggested refinements can be accommodated within the

province's current grant program structure and wishes to engage in conversation with the Tourism, Culture and Heritage as well as the Nova Scotia Arts and Culture Partnership Council to arrive at the most efficient manner to make these refinements.

GOAL 3

Work with province to refine funding structures for professional arts organizations. The structures should:

- a) Recognize the various stages of development of professional organizations and allow room for growth in ongoing operating funding (approximately 35% of additional funding).
- b) Ensure there is adequate funding for commissions and development of new works (approximately 10% of additional funding).
- c) Have a "special projects" component that is flexible enough to cover the variety of needs of individual companies. This area would include the marketing initiatives suggested in Goal 1 (f) (approximately 35% of additional funding).
- d) Have a touring component that assists the dissemination of theatre productions both inside and outside of Nova Scotia (approximately 10% of additional funding).
- e) Have a professional development component for individual artists and administrators (approximately 10% of additional funding).

Responsible: TNS Financial / Infrastructure Committee
Deadline: By 2007 - 08
Measure: Refined Funding Structure in place by 2007-08

Infrastructure

Over the past decade there have been several major theatre infrastructure projects successfully completed in the province of Nova Scotia. The completion of these projects has involved provincial assistance, however, the lack of any particular provincial government program dealing with cultural infrastructure has made the process of getting these projects completed more difficult for arts organizations (and likely the government itself). With the expanding theatre sector and aging infrastructure it is likely there will be a continuing need for infrastructure investment.

GOAL 1

Work with province to develop a cultural infrastructure program similar to the Federal Cultural Spaces Program. Calculate value of program based upon money that province has invested in cultural infrastructure over past ten years.

Responsible: TNS Financial / Infrastructure Committee

Deadline: By 2008 - 09

Measure: New Program in place by 2008-09

The theatre, for all its artifices, depicts life in a sense more truly than history, because the medium has a kindred movement to that of real life, though an artificial setting and form.

George Santayana

Spanish born American philosopher, poet and humanist who made important contributions to aesthetics, speculative philosophy and literary criticism. 1863-1952

The future success of Nova Scotia's many new theatre companies is impacted by their ability to find appropriate and affordable spaces to prepare and present their work.

GOAL 2

Ensure there are affordable and accessible performance, rehearsal and administrative theatre spaces for Nova Scotian companies.

Responsible: TNS Financial / Infrastructure Committee

Deadline: By 2007 - 08

Measure: New Program in place by 2007-08

Tactics

- a) Define what “affordable” means
- b) Work with Federal, Provincial and Municipal governments on policy regarding use of government owned facilities for performance, rehearsal, administrative spaces by 2007-08.
- c) Ensure the issue of sustaining existing spaces is accounted for in granting structures.
- d) Work with governments and banking institutions to develop a solution for the difficulties with attaining capital loans for performing arts companies.
- e) Work with Nova Scotia municipalities to create a coherent province wide strategy on property taxes for performing arts spaces.
- f) Develop an inventory of current theatre spaces and prices in province by 2006 (see appendix).

Human Resource

The Province of Nova Scotia is blessed with an abundance of Universities. Four of these institutions have theatre arts programs. In order to ensure both a vibrant theatre sector and a vibrant University theatre community it is important to expand upon areas of cooperation to the benefit of the University’s students and the theatre sector.

GOAL 1

Work with post-secondary and community college institutions to develop internship / apprenticeship / co-op programs for theatre artists and administrative personnel by 2007.

Responsible: TNS Human Resource Committee
Deadline: By 2007 - 08
Measure: 10 new apprentice / intern / co-op positions created by 2007 -08

The Nova Scotia Theatre Sector is only as strong as those people who make it up. The playwrights, actors, directors, designers, technicians and administrators are the life blood of the sector. In order to keep a healthy and vibrant theatre sector in the province it will be important to have professional development opportunities available for all sector workers.

GOAL 2

Have bi-annual professional development conferences for theatre professionals.

Responsible: TNS Human Resource Committee
Deadline: By 2007 - 08
Measure: Institute annual professional development days by 2007 -08

I regard the theatre as the greatest of all art forms, the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being.

Oscar Wilde

Irish poet, novelist, dramatist and critic, 1854-1900

The Nova Scotia Theatre Sector is conscious of the need to ensure that all Nova Scotians have the opportunity to fully participate in the theatre arts. To this end the Theatre Sector Strategy includes the following goal related to diversity.

GOAL 3

Work to ensure that there are no barriers to participation in the theatre arts for any portion of Nova Scotia's population.

Responsible: TNS Human Resource Committee
Deadline: By 2009 - 10
Measure: Increase theatre productions / presentations by and for underrepresented communities in Nova Scotia to a level that corresponds to population.

Tactics

- a) Create Diversity sub-committee of Human Resource Committee for Theatre Nova Scotia
- b) Ensure information on Funding programs for theatre reach all segments of Nova Scotia's society.
- c) Establish pro-active programs and workshops to assist under represented communities to participate in the theatre arts.

The problem of getting, training and keeping qualified administrative support has been a great challenge to the theatre sector for a number of years. In other parts of the country this problem has been lessened by the existence of organizations designed to assist small and medium sized arts organizations with their administrative needs.

GOAL 4

Work with other arts sectors in the province to develop an administrative organization that can bring assistance to small and medium sized companies that could benefit from experienced administrative support.

Responsible: TNS Human Resource Committee
Deadline: By 2007 - 08
Measure: Have multi-disciplinary organization in place by deadline.

Tactics

- a) Create a task force with other provincial arts umbrella organizations to develop a structure and obtain funding to launch program.

GOAL 5

Improve mechanisms for individual artists to get their work known by potential employers.

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|--------------|---|
| Responsible: | TNS Human Resource Committee |
| Deadline: | By 2007 - 08 |
| Measure: | Develop at least two new initiatives to heighten employer's awareness of NS talent. |

Tactics

- a) Organize annual work fair where artistic directors will have the opportunity to audition and speak with provincial artists.
- b) Develop on-line talent base for actors, technicians, designers and playwrights.
- c) Support initiatives that give opportunity for artistic community in NS to interact.

The first three goal areas have focussed on near and medium term projects to improve the position of Nova Scotia's Theatre Sector. The next section focuses on Goals which will be crucial to the long term health of the Theatre Sector, providing both future audiences and theatre workers

We need a type of theatre which not only releases the feelings, insights and impulses possible within the particular historical field of human relations in which the action takes place, but employs and encourages those thoughts and feelings which help transform the field itself.

Bertolt Brecht

German poet and playwright, 1898-1956

Long Term Development

For most Nova Scotians, and most other Canadians, the first exposure to theatre is in the school system. With the many challenges that have faced the education system in the province over the years members of the theatre sector are very concerned that this area of exposure is no longer as complete as it once was. If people are not exposed to theatre at an early age it will become increasingly more difficult to move them into the categories of theatre audiences and workers.

GOAL 1

Work with governments and educators to improve access to drama education and exposure in Elementary, Junior and Senior High Schools.

Responsible: TNS Long Term Development Committee

Deadline: By 2009 - 10

Measure: 20 % more theatre presentations for students in 2009-10 over 2003-04 and
20 % more students receiving some form of drama education.

Tactics

- a) Create Joint Task force to include representatives of Theatre Nova Scotia the provincial Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage and the Department of Education to address the best approaches to improving access to drama and drama education in the schools.

There is ample evidence that the arts help students develop the attitudes, characteristics, and intellectual skills required to participate effectively in today's society and economy. The arts teach self-discipline, reinforce self-esteem, and foster the thinking skills and creativity so valued in the workplace. They teach the importance of teamwork and cooperation. They demonstrate the direct connection between study, hard work, and high levels of achievement."

Kent Seidel, PhD

Produced by Theatre Nova Scotia

Theatrical productions are expensive to tour, however, it is essentially important that theatre be available outside the province's urban areas.

GOAL 2

Improve access to professional theatre productions throughout the province by encouraging touring.

Responsible: TNS Long Term Development Committee
Deadline: By 2009 - 10
Measure: 25 % more theatre presentations of companies performing outside their home base.

Tactics

- a) Work to ensure that provincial funding programs have adequate resources to:
 - assist theatre companies with the added costs associated with the touring of productions.
 - re-establish program to help off-set the costs for the province's presenters to feature the work of Nova Scotian theatre companies.
 - Work with local arts councils to remove any barriers to the successful presentation of Nova Scotia theatre companies.

"The 'back-to-basics' curriculum, while it has merit, ignores the most urgent void in our present system - absence of self-discipline. The arts, inspiring - indeed requiring - self-discipline, may be more basic to our national survival than the traditional credit courses."

Paul Harvey

“It has been said more than once that however important our suggestions may be, their acceptance might well be delayed until the sky is clearer. To answer this, we must ask another question. If we as a nation are concerned with the problem of defense, what we may ask ourselves, are we defending? We are defending civilization, our share of it, our contribution to it. The things with which our inquiry deals are the elements which give civilization its character and meaning. It would be paradoxical to defend something which we are unwilling to strengthen and enrich, and which we even allow to decline.”

Royal Commission on Arts, Letters and Sciences

(“The Massey Commission”, 1951, p. 274)

APPENDICES

THEATRE SECTOR ECONOMIC INFORMATION

The resources available for this strategy were not such that we could conduct a detailed economic analysis of Nova Scotia's theatre sector. We were, however, able to garner a significant amount of data from two sources (The Council for Business and the Arts in Canada Annual Survey of Performing Arts Organizations 2003-04 and Revenue Canada's charitable return information for that same period) which offer a reasonably solid picture of the activities of Nova Scotia's professional theatre companies.

The information below is essentially data related to Theatre Nova Scotia member companies and does not include data from areas such as University Theatre Department's or the activities of the many individual artists who garner income from projects not related to theatre companies or from outside the province. Despite the limitations of the data collection we have been able to accomplish we believe what is listed below begins to paint a picture of the professional theatre sector in Nova Scotia.

Total Theatre Company expenses **\$7.97 million**

Total Theatre Company revenues **\$8.21 million**

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| Theatre Company Earned Revenues | \$4.68 million |
| Theatre Company revenues from private sector fund raising | \$1.28 million |
| Theatre Company revenues from all government sources | \$2.26 million* |
| *(Theatre Company revenues from Province of Nova Scotia | \$0.76 million) |

A quick analysis of these numbers using a short-form calculation that the Canada Council for the Arts has used in the past would indicate that these companies would have an economic impact of approximately \$17.6 million on the province of Nova Scotia and just over \$24.6 million on the nation as a whole. Successful implementation of this Strategy would be expected to increase those numbers by approximately 50% over the next five years.

One of the first aspects of implementing this strategy will be the collection of data from 2004-05. From that data we will derive the benchmarks for determining success of many of the strategy's stated goals.

