pennsylvania
COUNCIL ON THE ARTS

PCA Creative Communities
Letter of Interest Coversheet

Lead Applicant Information

Organization: The Wilma Theater

Address: 265 South Broad Street

City: Philadelphia **Zip Code:** 19107

Municipality: Philadelphia **County:** Philadelphia

Phone: 215-893-9456

Website: www.wilmatheater.org

FEIN: 23-7425668

Contact Name: Jason Rosenberg

Contact Title: Writing and Research Specialist

Contact Phone: 215-893-9456

Contact Email: jrosenberg@wilmatheater.org

Organization Type: 501(c)3

☑ **By checking the box, you are indicating acknowledgment of and intention to comply with the local government resolution requirement, if your community is selected to participate in the Creative Communities Pilot Program. (See full application guidelines for more information on this requirement.)**

Letter of Interest (LOI) Submission Instructions: LOI deadline, Friday, June 28, 2019. LOIs must be submitted via email to RA-OAcreativepa@pa.gov.

a. Completed coversheet form with acknowledgment of and intention to comply with the local government resolution requirement, if your community is selected to participate in the Creative Communities Pilot Program.

b. Narrative (3 pages max.)
   - Brief community description.
   - Description of any existing cultural plans and/or experience implementing arts-based development strategies.
   - Description of successful community partnerships.
   - Description of community opportunity or challenge the organization would like to address through this program.

c. 3 Letters of Support (local government, planning, convention and visitors bureau (CVB), business improvment district (BID), chamber of commerce, local arts organization, etc.).

The Wilma Theater
Request to the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts
Creative Communities Pilot Initiative

Executive Summary

The Wilma Theater requests the support of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts in expanding our community engagement and outreach endeavors through our Portable Studio program in partnership with The Free Library of Philadelphia's Division of Learning and Civic Engagement and Broad Street Ministries, a social service organization, both of whom have been collaborators with the Wilma for 2 years. We request $50,000 over two years to fund exciting new partnership expansions, including piloting a theater-based storytelling workshop at the Free Library for English Language Learners (ELL) in an effort to deepen English immersion in a non-classroom setting, and building out a regular weekly programming schedule with Broad Street Ministries, a substantial growth from our current seasonal programming partnership. The goal for these partnerships is to utilize the Wilma's artmaking practice to build communication skills, emotional literacy, and confidence in participants, while simultaneously building strong, mutually beneficial relationships with community-based institutions which we leverage as resources in both programmatic and cross-promotional partnerships.

About the Portable Studio

Founded in 2017, the Wilma's Portable Studio Program, helmed by Portable Studio Program Director Lee Ann Etzold, brings theater-making workshops to mission driven organizations that have strong, meaningful relationships with the communities they serve. Wilma teaching artists lead workshops hosted by partner organizations, based around the themes and content of Wilma productions, inviting each partner and, when appropriate, constituents to the Wilma to a performance of the production that informs their respective work in the Portable Studio.

We work closely with each partner organization to design a customized plan of engagement and programming, allowing each partner to utilize the resources of the Portable Studio and the Wilma as they see fit. We are careful to match engagement with administrative capacity of each partner, reducing the administrative burden at organizations that lack adequate infrastructure to support a high-intensity partnership while investing more resources in partnerships who can handle more robust programming. The process of building a partnership is iterative, and we are careful to constantly monitor feedback from teaching artists, partner administrators, and participants to ensure each partnership is productive and mutually beneficial, making adjustments when needed.

Community Description

There are several distinct communities we wish to serve through this project.

The first is the community of those who access services at Broad Street Ministry. These individuals include those experiencing homelessness, those experiencing food insecurity, disabled people, and those battling addiction. Many of the guests of the Broad Street Ministry are transient but are generally located in the City of Philadelphia. Broad Street Ministry has a great deal of integrating arts-based programming into their own to offer a broader range of hospitality and social services to its guests, working in partnerships with third party organizations like the Wilma as well as directly employing teaching artists themselves. Program staff has relayed that due to their guests' experiences with trauma, mental illness, and scarcity, the vulnerability and openness encouraged in participants by arts programming must be met with a consistent programming schedule and a well thought-out exit strategy from partners. As such, while we have currently found success in a shorter-term seasonal partnership after a great deal of effort and design, we are seeking to expand it so that we may offer workshops weekly throughout the year. We have had two successful residencies with Broad Street Ministry in the

past, and both the Wilma and Broad Street Ministry are confident that this expansion would significantly advance our respective goals.

The next group of communities we seek to serve include those for whom English is a non-native language through our partnership with the Free Library of Philadelphia. We are currently in talks to engage partner branches at the Independence Library and Lillian Marrero Library in Chinatown and West Kensington, respectively. These two branches were identified by staff from the library's Division of Learning and Civic Engagement as ideal sites for a pilot launch of ELL-targeted workshops, given each neighborhood's high concentration of English language learners and the branches' current level of engagement in the community already. Participants in these workshops are looking to immerse themselves in the English language in a non-formal setting beyond a typical English class, which often tend to strictly focus on career-readiness and phrases which are used in business environments. They are also looking to form relationships with those in their community, particularly English-speakers, who they report feeling distant from given the language barriers. Our partners at the Library have expressed interest in engaging each branch's entire constituency, rather than strictly focusing on the participants in their popular ELL-program, thereby achieving the desired social outcomes from ELL-participants. We have worked at a number of branches in the Library since 2017, including the Independence Branch. Marrero Library would be a new partner for the Wilma, and allow us to continue the growth of this successful partnership.

Description of Problem/Challenges Addressed

We designed the expansions of our partnerships through this initiative in order to creatively and holistically build connection and new avenues of expression, compassion, and self-confidence in communities that feel isolated from the greater community. English language learners and the populations served by the Broad Street Ministry struggle with communication and building relationships, and have small or non-existent social networks given their circumstances. Over and over again, participants in the Portable Studio tell us that the tools provided through our theater-making practice have granted them access to new tools through which they can share their story with others and be heard. While government benefits and assistance programs can connect vulnerable populations such as the ones we serve with resources and opportunities, they cannot address the human need to connect with others and to build empathy and openness across communities the way that being able to tell one's story in one's own words can. Of course, there are other, more measurable benefits that participants will enjoy, such as an increased proficiency with language and communication, public speaking skills, and creative thinking/problem solving. We have also found that Portable Studio participants feel closer to one another and have more affinity for our partner organizations through this work, and we are able to provide creative solutions to partner organizations to achieve their own missions as well.

As a significant cultural asset in the greater community of Philadelphia, the Wilma stands to substantially benefit from these partnerships as well. For instance, our relationship with Broad Street Ministry enabled Wilma teaching artists to undergo the training Broad Street Ministry provides to their staff in trauma-informed service, while our partnership with the Library will allow us to build greater capacity and proficiency in teaching theater in an ELL-environment, which will significantly impact our educational programming wherein we work with Philadelphia public high schools that have their own ELL programs.

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Description of Existing Cultural Plans/Successful Community Partnerships

The Portable Studio Program was designed to harness the transformative power of theater in order to build affinity for the art form in participants through first-hand, interactive exposure, while simultaneously allowing community organizations who are deeply involved in their communities and have a strong understanding of what they need integrate live arts experiences into their programming in a way that was productive, that they could administratively support, and that made most sense for their needs and the needs of their constituents. We have served a number of community organizations over the past two years, including:
-Attic Youth Program, an LGBT Youth Center
-The Philadelphia Senior Center
-Baker Industries, a re-entry and job placement organization for those with disabilities or who have been through the justice system
-Women Against Abuse
-The Philadelphia Library (Independence, Haverford, South Philadelphia, and Logan Branches)
-Resident Action Committee, a neighborhood advocacy organization
-Broad Street Ministry

Each of our partnerships has been based in a fundamental commitment to serve the needs of our partners and closely strategize with them in order to capitalize on our respective strengths and resources.

Baker Industries

June 28, 2019

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To Whom It May Concern:

Baker Industries would like to express its wholehearted endorsement of The Wilma Theater's Portable Studio program. We engaged the Portable Studio in our Job Readiness Program early 2018. Portable Studio artist Anthony Martinez-Briggs lead a residency around the Wilma's production of *Passage* by Christopher Chen, and then again during their 2019 production of *Romeo and Juliet*.

We value the time our constituents spend on their arts programming, and consider it to be crucial to developing soft skill sets for success in the workforce such as public speaking, creative thinking, and collaboration. The Wilma and Anthony equally valued the time of our participants, and worked closely with us to plan programming that was responsive to our needs and the needs of the individuals asked to participate in the Portable Studio. It was a true partnership, where we had equal say over the programming the Wilma conducted, and we were adequately connected to the resources they could provide.

The dedication that Anthony and the Wilma had for our organization was apparent in all of their contact with us and every interaction they had with our participants. Anthony has become a beloved fixture of the Job Readiness participants who have worked in the Portable Studio. Participants now feel that they are a part of the arts community in Philadelphia instead of being on the outside. Some now regularly go to cultural events in the city. The workshops built self-esteem and self-expression that impacted their entire lives, not just their work lives. Sharing their theater/performance with a diverse audience served as a real equalizer. As a "performer/artist," participants were no longer just people with a criminal record; they became people with a point of view and with value. It changed how participants perceive themselves and also how they are perceived by others.

We truly appreciate the work that the Wilma has put into making their space and the art of theater accessible to our participants. We hope you will consider their application for support favorably.

Sincerely,

Beth Tiewater

Beth Tiewater
Director of Programming

184 Pennsylvania Avenue, Malvern, Pennsylvania 19355-2864
Tel: (610) 296-9795 Fax: (610) 296-0447 Federal Tax ID#: 23-2560245
www.bakerindustries.org

June 27, 2019

Lee Ann Etzold
Portable Studio Program Director
The Wilma Theater
265 South Broad Street
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Dear Ms. Etzold:

On behalf of the Free Library of Philadelphia, I am pleased to submit this letter that serves as our commitment to partner programmatically with the Wilma Theater Portable Studios as you expand your outreach and impact in communities across Philadelphia.

The success of previously instituted Portable Studio programs at Independence Library, South Philadelphia Library, and Logan Library, has enabled these communities to share universal experiences through listening, storytelling, and creativity, with the added highlight of seeing live theater with their neighbors.

In our role as partner, the Free Library will commit to hosting at least two different portable studio programs. We anticipate Lillian Marrero Library will explore the Wilma production *17 Border Crossings* in a bilingual program that considers real and imagined borders. We also wish to collaborate around *Renaissance in the Belly of a Killer Whale* at Independence Library, tying in its themes of gentrification with real-world experiences in African American and Asian American communities in Philadelphia. There are also program possibilities found in the Wilma's other 2019-20 plays. The Free Library's in-kind commitment of space and staff time will exceed 10% of the project budget.

The Free Library is honored to continue our partnership with Wilma Theater's Portable Studios to reach new and diverse audiences, bringing Philadelphians together in a shared space with their neighbors to explore the art of listening and storytelling with the guidance of theater teaching artists.

Sincerely,

Andrew Nurkin
Deputy Director, Enrichment and Civic Engagement

Free Library of Philadelphia Foundation
1901 Vine Street, Suite 111, Philadelphia, PA 19103-1189
215-567-7710 | freelibrary.org

A copy of the official registration and financial information of the Free Library of Philadelphia may be obtained from the PA Department of State by calling toll free, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

Broad Street Ministry

radical hospitality

June 21, 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

Broad Street Ministry would like to express its commitment to collaborate with The Wilma Theater's Portable Studio programming to bring storytelling workshops to our constituents throughout their 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 Seasons. Now in our second year of partnership with the Wilma, we have found tremendous value in their Portable Studio program, which has allowed us to bring art programming to Broad Street Ministry guests that emphasizes new ways of self-discovery and tools for communication. Throughout the project period for this proposal, we will work together with the Portable Studio to bring weekly workshops led by Wilma teaching artists to Broad Street Ministry.

This would represent a significant advancement in our collaboration, as a consistent presence with programs in the arts which inspire vulnerability and trust in our guests is crucial to maintaining their wellbeing. The funding requested would allow us to bring the Wilma in every week for the two year period and maintain that consistency in a way that our organizations lack the resources to do on our own.

In short, we are fully committed to the Portable Studio Program for the program period listed in the application, and we hope you will consider it favorably.

Sincerely,

Mike Dahl
Executive Director

Broad Street Ministry
315 South Broad Street
Philadelphia, PA 19107

215-735-4847
www.broadstreetministry.org