

Theatre Horizon

Strategic Plan FY23-25

June 27, 2022

Mission

Theatre Horizon uses the transformative power of storytelling to foster empathy & create an inclusive home for artists, audiences, and students alike.

Vision

Transform Theatre Horizon into a Third Space, a space that reflects and celebrates Norristown's diversity, encourages equitable and inclusive practices, and provides equal access. We are inspired by the work of urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg who defines "third spaces" as those separate from work and home that are essential for civil society, democracy, and civic engagement across perceived boundaries. We want Theatre Horizon to be a space where people gather across disparate groups not only to watch plays and musicals, but to connect in ways that go beyond traditional theater.

While Theatre Horizon's mission from the beginning has been to build empathy, the Covid-19 pandemic and the pause to in-person productions provided an opportunity to explore new ways of doing this and to focus on relationship-building with Norristown residents. This plan will move us deeper into this work, giving us a structure to reexamine *how* we build empathy, particularly among disparate groups in our heterogeneous community. Our Antiracism Action Plan will be a key part of this. As a predominantly white institution, building empathy also means continuing to prioritize and build trust with Black and Brown Norristown residents who comprise over 60% of the population.

In becoming a Third Space we hope to serve as a model for how theaters function with and for the communities they serve.

Strategic Principles

These are the principles we discovered through our strategic planning process that we wish to carry forward over the next three years:

This is an adaptive plan that will continue to be shaped by feedback from staff, artists, Board Members, and most notably, the newly-formed Community Advisory Boards of Norristown residents.

We will prioritize relationship-building by bringing the art into the community and the community into the art.

We will work collaboratively across departments to creatively reimagine how we serve artists, audiences, students, donors, and newcomers to Theatre Horizon.

Theatre Horizon's culture has prioritized values of inclusion and empathy in the past; we will go deeper to become an actively and explicitly antiracist organization.

Our space is one of our most valuable assets. We can use it to make a difference in our community.

Our industry is irrevocably changed as the result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Over the next few years, we must resist the urge to readopt old practices that weren't serving us prior to the pandemic and will not serve us in the future.

Strategic Initiatives

1) Become a Third Space for the greater Norristown community, integrating art into the community and the community into our art.

- a. Objective: Showcase Norristown's talent and invite more first-time attendees into our space by presenting programs and events that move beyond producing traditional plays and musicals
 - i. Strategies:
 1. Based on the recommendations of our Community Advisory Board, host events that do not fit into traditional theatrical categories such as concert series, open mics, town halls, public forums, and festivals
 2. Develop a model for space usage beyond our rentals system that subsidizes space for artistic, education, and community-centered initiatives presented by others in our community
 3. Create a Theatre Horizon residency specifically for Norristown residents
- b. Objective: Provide opportunities for community members to become active participants in our art-making, instead of merely spectators
 - i. Strategies:
 1. Create original works like *TOWN* (premiering September 2022) in which the community is offered multiple pathways to participate in the artistic creation process; take the lessons we learn from *TOWN* to fundraise for and execute similar artistic works in the future, on a variety of scales, in which community members are invited to be creators and performers

- c. Objective: Reimagine our physical-space in the name of increased accessibility and visibility
 - i. Strategies:
 1. Built on input from the Community Advisory Board, use funding from The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage to foster a sense of belonging in our physical space for people from historically-excluded communities
 2. Work with the Facilities committee and the county to increase our visibility on E Penn Street and in the surrounding area
 3. Re-examine our ADA practices to ensure that patrons with physical needs feel welcome in our space; offer more options for those who are vision or hearing impaired to access our work (for example, implementing Smart Glasses in 2023)
 4. Commit to offering 2-3 performances a year that meet specific access needs (for example, offering resources for neurodivergent audiences)
- d. Objective: Norristown residents become active decision-makers in Theatre Horizon's programming
 - i. Strategies:
 1. Pilot a Community Advisory Board from Spring through Fall 2022 and determine a plan for seeking community input moving forward
 2. Open up the season planning process
 3. Increase amount of staff time spent in Norristown *outside* of Theatre Horizon's walls
 4. Dedicate a staff position to Community Engagement beyond *TOWN*

2) Reimagine our theatre and education programs in ways that resonate with our diverse audiences and creative teams.

- a. Objective: Community members see the value of the arts and the potential for skills in the arts as crucial to workforce development
 - i. Strategies: Develop new structures for mentorships and/or apprenticeships for future arts administrators, giving preference to Norristown applicants; find new opportunities to hire Norristown youth for jobs at the theater (for example, assistant teaching positions, marketing opportunities, etc.)
- b. Objective: Our Education and Artistic departments work in partnership to increase arts literacy and build future audiences and future participants in our programs
 - i. Strategies: Offer Education programming that connects more directly to the work on our stage (for example, an acting workshop for adults taught

- by an actor who is currently rehearsing with us); in each season, prioritize work that is appropriate for younger audiences and provide opportunities for students participating in programs at community partner sites to come into Theatre Horizon's space
- c. Objective: Spanish-speakers and members of Norristown's Latinx community feel at home at Theatre Horizon
 - i. Strategies: Offer bilingual, nonverbal, and Spanish language programming and marketing/fundraising materials; increase staff's cultural competency; recruit staff and teaching artists with fluency in Spanish; continue to meaningfully collaborate with our partners at ACLAMO and CCATE
 - d. Objective: Redesign our ticketing structure to make our productions accessible to more people without undervaluing the true cost of producing theatre
 - i. Strategies: Build a more transparent pricing model in which we give patrons the opportunity to learn the "true cost" of a show and choose a ticket price that works for them
 - e. Objective: Our Education programs are staffed by artists who teach through a trauma-informed and antiracist lens
 - i. Strategies: Pilot Philadelphia Teaching Artist Institute to ensure professional development for the teaching artists we work with, compensating teaching artists for this professional development and prep time, and retaining Teaching Artists in the region.

3) Build a business model that supports financial stability and our core values.

- a. Objective: Raise our financial ceiling so that our income more closely matches the quality of the work on our stage, in our offices, and in our classrooms
 - i. Strategies: Seek new income sources: invest in EITC program; complete the first phase of the Third Space Campaign and create goals for subsequent phases; open up new grant revenue streams by partnering with non-arts organizations
 - ii. Strategies: Revise older income streams and strategies: make bigger asks from Foundations and Individuals for general operating support to more closely match our expenses; be more transparent with audiences and donors about how much it costs to make a show; raise the amount needed to donate to become Honorary Producers
- b. Objective: How we receive income aligns with our core values and we are providing opportunities for people from historically-excluded communities to become donors

- i. Strategies: adopt community-centric fundraising practices such as opening up our events to all donors, regardless of amount of donation; explore collaborative fundraising with other non-profits
- c. Objective: Increase Theatre Horizon's brand and institutional visibility across Norristown, surrounding Montgomery County, and the Philadelphia region so audience attendance returns to pre-pandemic levels and reflects our community's diversity across race, ethnicity, age, language, socioeconomic status, and other demographics
 - i. Strategies: Increase targeted internet advertising—both in quantity, quality, and sophistication—to increase web visibility and traffic; increase email acquisition through digital capture and in-person efforts; increase outdoor lighting and signage to make the theater more visible to our audiences and passersby; invest resources to effectively engage Norristown residents, Spanish speakers, and Gen Z
- d. Objective: Our staff, board and artists are equipped with an understanding of antiracism and the tools to ensure their work is done through that lens
 - i. Strategies: Provide EDI consultants on retainer to support artists, board and staff, as well as leading structured trainings on an annual basis; increase the diversity of perspectives on our board and staff, specifically staff hires and Board Members who identify as BIPOC so that our team reflects the Norristown community we serve; develop a three-year antiracism action plan that will take us from 2023-2026; Revisit Theatre Horizon's core values and create new ones as part of this action plan
- e. Objective: Our staff, artists, teaching artists and other contractors are compensated fairly with opportunities for growth in their work
 - i. Strategies: Our Board's HR Committee will review benefits and salaries on an annual basis; set aside 7-10% of each production budget to support artist needs, such as travel to Norristown and childcare; continue prioritizing opportunities for paid professional development and prep time for our teaching artists