

Thame Players' Experience with the Theatres Trust

Thame Players' Applications

We have twice applied to the Theatres Trust's Small Grants Programme and twice been successful. The projects involved were as follows –

2014: Installation of a flexible, innovative door system behind the stage consisting of 3 panels on a tracking system which can be moved independently and removed altogether when required. It has greatly improved operational viability and accessibility and enables more ambitious sets to be built, maximising the full depth of the stage, and enabling entrances and exits from points not previously possible.

The £5,000 grant awarded by The Theatres Trust helped with the main building work replacing the rear stage wall. The Trust were very helpful in giving their view as part of the approval process for the necessary planning application.

The Trust's Planning and Heritage Adviser said to the planning authorities, "The Trust supports the application for a first-floor extension to the main auditorium of the Players' Theatre, Thame ... The stage and backstage areas ... are currently inadequate in size for accommodating professional productions which the resident Thame Players theatre group, and others, seek to perform. The Trust believes the proposed single-storey extension is totally necessary to provide greater height to the stagehouse for larger productions which in turn will broaden the appeal of the theatre to the wider community and attract new audiences.... Local theatres must adapt to the changing demands of their audience and users if they are to remain viable in the current economic climate and we are keen to support theatres to thrive."

2023: The replacement of an outdated and inefficient air conditioning unit with a much more energy-efficient and environmentally friendly system, consisting of three new units and a compressor, increasing air flow for audiences, performers and staff. The Player's Theatre is cooler when the temperature rises in summertime, and also more comfortable year-round, because the air conditioning distributes the air so that heat generated by the theatre lighting is dissipated. On this occasion, the Trust awarded £5,000, part of the total required, with Thame Players finding the balance elsewhere.

For our press release, their spokesperson said, "We are delighted to be contributing towards Thame Players' air conditioning project through our Small Grants Programme supported by The Linbury Trust. It is imperative that we continue to focus on the long-term sustainability of the theatre sector. This can be particularly challenging for volunteer-run venues, so the Theatres Trust is pleased to support this project which will make a vital contribution to Thame Players' ongoing journey to become carbon-neutral, so that the theatre is a more welcoming space for audiences."

Our Experience of the Theatres Trust

We have found them to be an excellent organisation to work with. The application forms are not too onerous (easier than some others, which can be very bureaucratic), and everything happens when intended – the awarding of the grant is notified when they say it will be (again, not all grant funders keep to the intended notification date). If there are queries or issues that need to be discussed, they are always at the end of an email, and always helpful. There is seldom a delay in dealing with queries. It is extremely helpful that the Trust understand theatres, and project descriptions that may not be readily understood by funders who do not have specific knowledge of theatres and performing venues are easily understood by the Theatres Trust team.

The Theatres Trust run three major grant schemes –

The Small Grants Programme, supported by The Linbury Trust, which funds small projects that make a big impact on a theatre's resilience, sustainability, accessibility or improve the diversity of audiences. This programme provides grants of up to £5,000 for essential works, enabling not-for-profit theatres across the UK to be viable and thrive.

The Theatre Improvement Scheme, in association with the Wolfson Foundation, which offers capital funding for theatres. Since 2017, grants totalling more than £750,000 have been awarded to help 46 theatres across the UK improve their buildings. The Wolfson Foundation renewed its support in 2024, with a further £510,000 to be awarded over the next three years. The theme is *Improving Environmental Sustainability* as this is an urgent priority for the sector. Theatre operators can apply for grants of up to £20,000 towards their building or equipment.

Resilient Theatres: Resilient Communities Grant Programme, which aims to achieve progress with the restoration, reopening or revitalising of theatres on the Trust's Theatres at Risk Register. The programme provides grants from £5,000 up to £20,000.

What is Required

These schemes are open to applicants who: own or manage theatres with titles or signed leases of more than five years on buildings in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; run a year-round programme of live performance, of no less than 30 performances a year; and have a bona fide UK charitable or not-for-profit legal structure.

Applicants for any of the programmes are required to complete an online application form and submit it by the deadline date indicated on the Trust's website. Decisions normally take up to 16 weeks.

The information required includes items such as - project description; impact of project; details of beneficiaries; programming approach taken at the theatre; details of productions; how the grant will be spent; risks involved; timescale to completion. Documents accompanying the application include project estimates; budget; accounts; planning permission (if applicable).

The Trust prefer to support identifiable elements of a project rather than being part funders of a major project. They like applicants to publicise the awarding of a grant via press releases etc.

Their website <https://www.theatrust.org.uk/how-we-help/grants-funding> is straightforward and it is easy to find out about the requirements of each of their grant schemes. The deadline dates for each programme are clearly visible; next deadline for the Small Grants Programme is 17th January 2025; next deadline for the Theatre Improvement Scheme is 6th September 2024.

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