



LANCASTER GRAND THEATRE

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EST 1782

How to Future Proof Your Theatre

Little Theatre Guild Northern Conference - 10 October 2025





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So who is this chap using up the rest of my morning?

Mark Hutton Beng(Hons) MIFireE

Footlights Member, Trustee, Chair

32 years in a Fire & Rescue Service

Member of the Senior Leadership Team for 6 years (Leadership & Responsibility)

Head of Training & Operational Review (Competence & Culture)

Head of Prevention & Protection (Compliance & Risk Management)





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Before we start....

What might stop your theatre being here next year.... or in 5 years.... or in 10 years?

Or in other words – what is worrying you?





Let's be clear – we want to be doing this 😊



But in order to do all that...

Somebody has
to take care of
of all this!



Chair of the Board & Lancaster Arts Partnership Rep
Secretary to the Board
Membership Secretary & Membership Experience
Little Theatre Guild Rep
Arts, Culture, & Heritage
Production Committee Chair
Front of House, Customer Service, Volunteer Experience, FoHWG
Safeguarding
Equality, Diversity, & Inclusion
Youth Engagement & Development
Safety, Health, & Wellbeing
Environment & Sustainability (See Arts Council Green Book)
Training, Learning, & Development
Information, Communication, & Technology
Data Controller
Constitutional Compliance & Insurance
Financial Management & Bookkeeping
Procurement & Contracts (Service & Goods)
Fundraising, Grants, & Fundraising Compliance
Facilities Management, Maintenance, & Projects
Human Resources, Leadership & Management



Purpose of today

To help life
feel a bit more
like this!



We'll some have some fun discussing....

Some tools for the box that *might* help your theatre survive and hopefully thrive!

- Mission
- Values
- Leadership & Engagement
- Risks
- Strategy



Don't worry if you don't lead this way – All our theatres are different sizes and have different operational models

Some theatres may have all of these, none, or any combination - and be fine!!

Others may find that all, none, or a combination, might help address some sticky embedded issues and/or head-off future problems for you or your successors



The importance of 'Mission'

Time for some silly questions....

- Why does your theatre exist?
- What is it for?
- Who is it for?
- What does success look & feel like?

That's great BUT....

- Do you think everyone involved within your theatre actually shares the same mission?
- Are people in your town / catchment aware of your mission?
- Why on earth is this important?



Our Mission Statement

The single inspiring phrase behind which everyone internally feels they can unite and... one that clearly explains to all external stakeholders what our organisation stands for:

“To be a place of joy, and a cornerstone of cultural and artistic excellence for our community and beyond”

For us – every part of this statement is regularly referred to, in particular being a place that grows and distributes JOY



Lancaster Footlights & Grand Theatre Values

Everyone wants to have a happy work,
volunteer, and visitor experience.

It's a theatre after all, so why not think
about the word '**ACTORS**'? Are you:

- A** Approachable
- C** Courteous
- T** Trusting
- O** Open-minded
- R** Respectful
- S** Supportive



Values

- How many theatres have Values?
- What do they look like?
- How do they help run a theatre?
- What happens without them?

Be wary of 'unintended consequences'
Always introduce gently & slowly
Build into everything you do
Be prepared to back up with conduct processes



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Leadership Style & Engagement



V



We have focussed on listening and learning



If you have capacity... & are ready to hear

- Be prepared to ask questions, consult and listen – FEEDBACK IS PRICELESS (mostly!!)
- Take time to understand what people are saying and why
- Take immediate and longer-term actions OR
- Explain why something can't be done
- Consider using tools to help gather feedback in a meaningful way e.g. Typeform / Google
- Consider holding engagement events
- Keep track of findings
- Look after each other – feedback can be painful and unwelcome...



Surveys

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Welcome to our Thank you & Feedback survey

We'd be very grateful if you could take a few moments to tell us about your experience here at Lancaster Footlights & Grand Theatre. Responses will be collated and presented at the upcoming Thankyou & Feedback event, and afterwards used to continually improve your experience at the Grand.

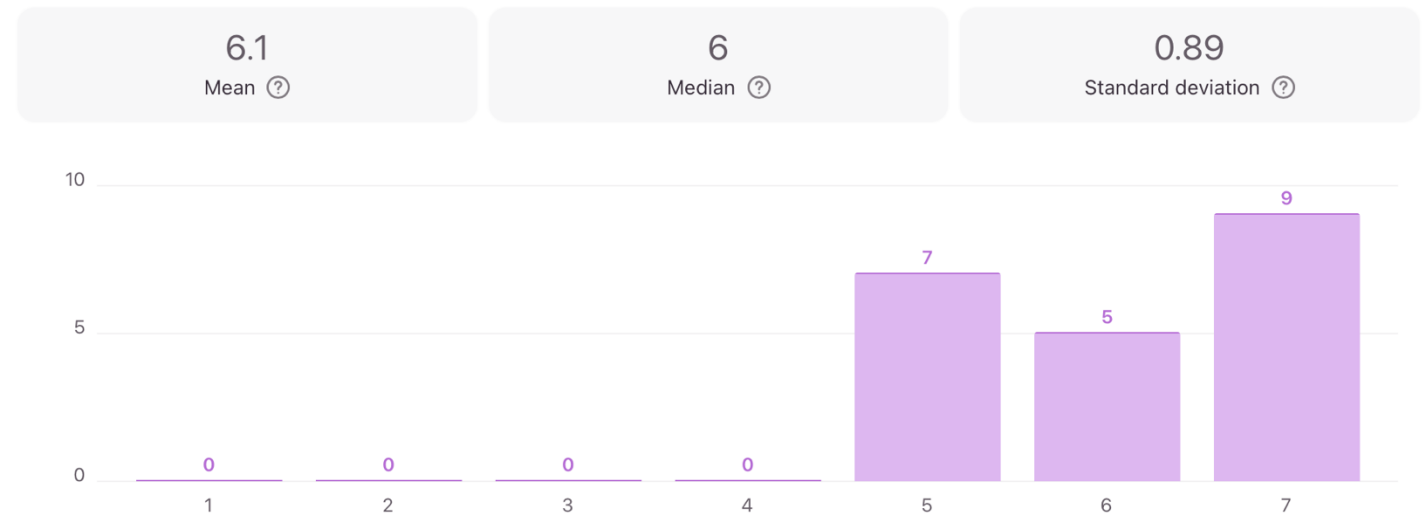
Start press Enter ↵

⌚ Takes X minutes

4a Do you find volunteering at the Grand enjoyable?



21 out of 48 people answered this question.



Surveys

≡ 4b

We'd like to understand more about why you scored that way, can you share your thoughts in a few words?

17 out of 48 people answered this question.

Q Search responses



💬

Love the theatre and meeting the public

7 months ago

💬

Usually it is OK but occasionally some people forget we are volunteers

7 months ago

💬

I enjoy meeting guests at the theatre and working with my peers. Like anywhere there are some staff members that I feel 'uncomfortable' working with, ...

7 months ago

💬

I love the beauty of the theatre, the variety of shows and diverse groups that come which gives me the opportunity to serve and chat to our patrons an...

7 months ago

💬

It is enjoyable though I do wonder why we have to arrive one hour early (I know doors can open 45 mins before). Also, having to stand all the time wh...

7 months ago

💬

I love spending time in such a beautiful historic building. I love feeling part of a Team to make the shows happen. I love assisting the audience me...

7 months ago

*Writing surveys is a skill, don't rush it, always be open, never lead, try 7-point scales
Never undertake a survey unless you are prepared to do something with the results*



Understanding & Managing Risk

What is risk in a theatre context?



Risk category	Examples
Governance risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inappropriate organisational structure • trustee body lacks relevant skills or commitment • conflicts of interest
Operational risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of beneficiary welfare or safety • poor contract pricing • poor staff recruitment and training • doubt about security of assets
Financial risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inaccurate and/or insufficient financial information • inadequate reserves and cash flow • dependency on limited income sources • inadequate investment management policies • insufficient insurance cover
External risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • poor public perception and reputation • demographic changes such as an increase in the size of beneficiary group • turbulent economic or political environment • changing government policy
Compliance with law and regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • acting in breach of trust • poor knowledge of the legal responsibilities of an employer • poor knowledge of regulatory requirements of particular activities (eg fund-raising, running of care facilities, operating vehicles)



Not all risks are, or stay, the same

Impact	Extreme/ Catastrophic	5	10	15	20	25	30
	Major	4	8	12	16	20	24
	Moderate	3	6	9	12	15	18
	Minor	2	4	6	8	10	12
	Insignificant	1	2	3	4	5	6
			1	2	3	4	5
			Remote	Unlikely	Possible	Probable	Highly Probable
			Likelihood				

You get to decide which are the biggest risks facing you

You can add new risks at any time and re-grade existing ones

Should be a regular review

Helps new leaders quickly understand their responsibilities



Key risks we have been managing

- Planned car park closures
- Insufficient resources in our staff team
- Insufficient resources in our trustee team
- Culture
- Member & Volunteer communication & engagement
- Compliance
- Insurance
- Refurbishment & Project Management



So how does this help my theatre?

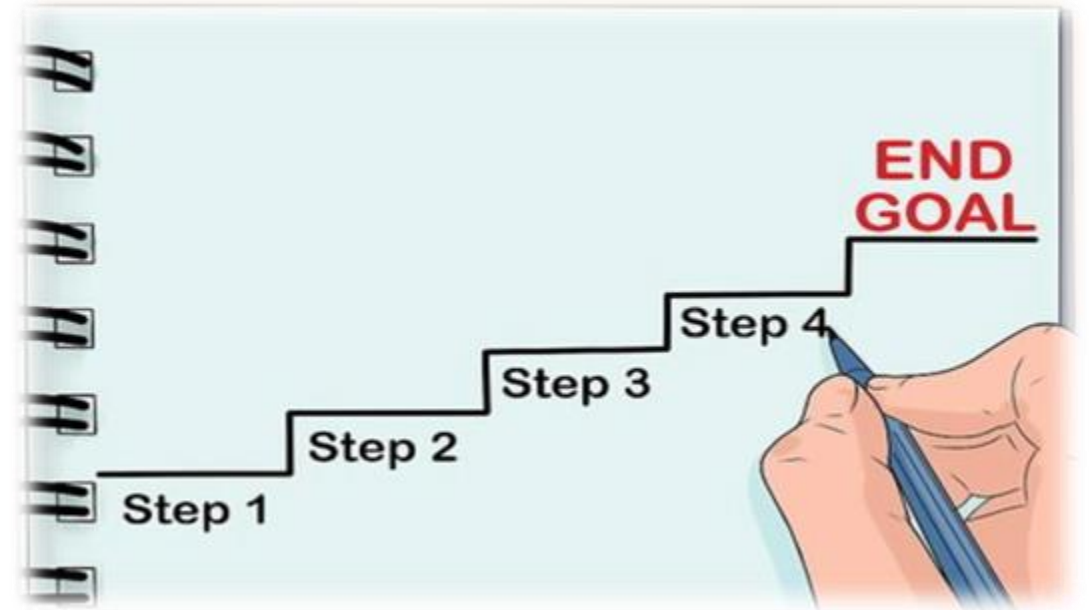
- Helps leaders spot what might go wrong in the future, *which then*
- Allows those things to be discussed and graded, *which then*
- Allows leaders to focus precious time, effort & resource on stopping them or at least reducing the impact, *which then*
- Helps leaders tell a consistent and compelling story to everyone else, *which then*
- **Inspires wider understanding, unity, team spirit and shared sense of purpose**

*The term 'Risk Register' sends everyone to sleep
But the process of doing it makes the future visible
The charity commission guidance is excellent*



Strategy

What's the difference between a strategy and a plan...



Why might a strategy help my theatre?

- Demonstrates to members, volunteers & staff that leadership team cares,
- Inspires confidence that the leadership team is in touch and has 'grip'
- Explains what change is coming and crucially - why its necessary
- Explains, in a general sense, how you intend to deliver your Mission
- Explains, in a general sense, what your priorities are (in a realistic period – usually 3 years)
- Explains what you intend to do in order to deliver each priority

*It's **your** chance to tell **your** story - if you don't **someone else will***

- *Internally (engagement)*
- *Externally (marketing, grants, political support)*



What should be in a Strategy?

What ever is needed to succeed and tie everything from the previous slides together so you can show how you

- Will understand and head off the most significant risks facing your theatre
- Address your most significant engagement issues
 - Internally
 - Externally
- Ensure your organisation is crystal clear about what is coming down the tracks and adapts to cope

A good strategy will:

Be delivered through consultation

Ensure you are on the front foot writing your own future not constantly reacting

Ensure you can make the big decisions that will help the smaller ones happen more naturally in future – this usually links in with fund-raising and recruitment



2. Our Strategy, Our Priorities

This three-year strategy, for the period 2024-27, incorporates the following key priorities:

- Ia. Member wellbeing, satisfaction, and engagement
- Ib. Staff wellbeing, satisfaction, and engagement
- 2. Maintaining financial security
- 3. Ensuring legal compliance.
- 4. Acknowledging the importance of organisational culture
- 5. Our Contribution to the Arts & our City
- 6. Improving our use of Information, Communication & Technology
- 7. Protecting the Theatre Building
- 8. New Foyer project

In the following pages we will describe in more detail why we have chosen these priorities and how we intend to deliver against them. We will use these headings to update our membership on progress throughout the course of the strategy.



Worrying doesn't solve anything...

Take care of your people and organisation, and good things will generally flow from that...





THANK YOU for all you do



Reflections & Questions?

