

## *IPI APPLICATION GUIDELINES – updates for Round 2*

### ***Who is eligible to apply:***

*Eligible to apply are theater artists who are Chicago area residents independently producing readings or plays within the City of Chicago. Submissions must identify the project's "lead producer" or producers.*

### ***By "independent," we mean:***

*IPI is intended to support productions not programmed or sponsored by a theater company with 501c3 tax status. Key personnel may be connected to or employed by a theater company, but the production for which support is being sought is not part of any company's season or programming. (The independent production can of course receive help from theater colleagues without being "disqualified" from this opportunity.) If you work with a team that produces occasionally under a particular name but is not incorporated as a company, you would still be considered independent for the purposes of this application.*

### ***What we can support:***

*The Independent Productions Initiative is in its pilot phase, still growing its pool of funds. Although there may be elements of dance, music, circus arts, video, sketch comedy, etc. in the submitted project, currently we are prioritizing the production of plays vs. other types of performance arts such as concerts, open mic nights, dance recitals, etc. Grants from the Independent Productions Initiative are intended to help with the overall cost of public performances, whether a staged reading, single-night performance or full run of a play. Currently, we do not have the capacity to provide funding for:*

- Individual artist fellowships or residencies*
- Pre-production new play development writer-support*
- Private workshops, School drama department productions*

**Requirements and Priorities:** *This initiative was started by theater artists in support of theater in Chicago, intended to expand resources and opportunities, and address current needs. We will only support productions that are committed to ensuring spaces, structures, and processes free of racism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, misogyny, classism, or other bias.*

*As artists ourselves, we are continuously iterating, adapting, and evolving our approaches and grantmaking criteria. Although we recognize that there will always be questions and variations, we will adhere to the following eligibility requirements for our 2026 cycle:*

- *A public performance must take place within 12 months of the grant received. Your production must provide IPI a shareable, accessible link to performance information; schedule, location, ticket info if applicable, etc., to share on our website.*
- *The performance must be within the City of Chicago.*
- *The project must submit a short report afterwards. We will be asking for attendance figures, a financial overview, and a personal statement on the experience overall.*
- *Commit to paying personnel on their project.*
- *Uphold the standards for producing entities concerning what's right, fair, and ethical as outlined by the Dramatists Guild; (<https://www.dramatistsguild.com/benefits-and-services/best-practices-contests-festivals>), by Chicago Theater Standards (<https://notinourhouseorg.wordpress.com> and by We See You, White American Theater (<https://www.weseeyouwat.com/statement>)*
- *A commitment to accessibility. Our panelists will be taking accessibility into consideration as part of the review process. By accessibility, we are*

*thinking about artists and audiences. Economic accessibility is of particular interest, as these funds are intended to broaden access to the form (not restrict it to the privileged few). Keep this in mind as you detail your admissions / ticket plan, as well as any efforts/intentions around audiences / artists with different needs (ASL, ADL, etc.). There are resources on the 3Arts website offering further guidance.*

## **Grants**

*We will be making grant decisions with consideration to the following priorities:*

- *Diversity and the equitable distribution of funds across teams and the communities in which projects are centered;*
- *The ability of producing teams to carry out the project, which might relate to experience level, other funding secured, community support, etc.*
- *Artist and team compensation is a requirement— and a priority for us as artist advocates! If you are not intending to pay people, then your production would not be a candidate for a grant from this Initiative. Although we are not currently restricting grants to compensation exclusively, we are assuming that is where the bulk of our funding will go.*

### **Scale of Grants**

*This project is in its “pilot” phase, with fundraising ongoing. In our first round of funding (fall of 2025), we awarded 22 grants totalling \$48,000. In our second round (spring of 2026), we anticipate awarding at least \$55,000 in grants ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000.*

**Process:** *We ask applicants to keep in mind that this is money raised and allocated by Chicago theater community volunteers, so we’re grateful in advance for your patience and understanding of our capacity.*

*Grant awardees will be selected by a panel of volunteers who are part of our founding group, after a review of applications. No member of that group can receive a grant for their own work. They are doing this simply for the benefit of the theatre community overall. Decisions will be made based on the priorities listed on the previous page.*

***Timeline:***

*March 2 – Open for submissions*

*March 6, 11 a.m. – Informational session. Join the Zoom*

*<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/6628396179?pwd=K0R4aGpzcS9BeFBCaUICYjM2S3BDZz09&omn=87055845472> (no advance registration is required).*

*April 10 – Application window closes*

*June – Decisions made; grant distribution can begin*

*Your production should take place between June 2026 - June 2027.*

***If Funded:***

*You will have a coach/specialist from Redtwist Theatre who will be available for questions and advice. Generally speaking (based on each project's need), grant amounts will be distributed as direct payments up to the amount of your grant to cover the budget items you choose, e.g. artist compensation and space rental fees. In other words, thanks to Redtwist Theatre serving as fiscal sponsor and partner, the contact person helming your project does not take on personal income tax liability relative to the full contribution– i.e. does not receive the grant in their name in a lump sum for redistribution. (They are of course responsible for the taxes on whatever payment might come to them personally as their own stipend or fee).*

*Please note that as mentioned throughout this document, artist and team compensation is a requirement. If you are not covering personnel*

*compensation from other sources, we ask that you use our grant for that. In fact, given the small size of these grants, we are assuming payouts will be primarily for people, and in some cases towards space rental costs.*

*Along with the dollars awarded, funded projects get “coaching” as needed from our partners at Redtwist, and from the IPI committee members who have a wealth of different connections and resources to share; use of Redtwists’s ticketing platform if desired; promotion on the IPI tab on Redtwist’s website page, and other benefits.*

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## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**1. Can 501c3 nonprofits apply?** *No, IPI is designed to support independent efforts that are not already part of a nonprofit's programming.*

**2. Can producers/playwrights funded by IPI last year apply again this year for a second project?** *Sorry, just in fairness to others, you need to skip a year if you were funded by us with more than \$500 in support last year. This applies to anybody listed as a producer in the application. If you only received \$500 from us, or did not receive a grant, then you can apply for another project this year.*

**3. Can I apply for the exact same project and team, if my application was declined last time?** *Not for this round. [And we’ll be grumpy if you do.]*

**4. If some of my team members or actors reside outside the city of Chicago but our production will be in Chicago, can we still apply?**

*Artists who are Chicago area residents living within the city or suburbs and independently producing readings or plays within the City of Chicago are eligible to apply. Our intent is to support Chicago theater artists, so we are not interested in out-of-town teams bringing in shows from elsewhere to produce in Chicago.*

**5. Do I need to have my full cast and team identified before applying?**

*No, but anything that helps provide a better picture of what you have in mind is helpful.*

**6. Are you prioritizing applications from ongoing collectives or teams producing multiple shows over one-time productions?** *No. One-off projects, occasional teams, or ongoing theater collectives are all welcome to apply, as long as they are not a 501c3 organization. Each production should identify one individual as the Lead Applicant to serve as the primary contact.*

**7. Are you open to funding productions of existing plays, or only new plays?** *We love new plays by Chicago playwrights, but it is your production and entirely your choice, and we are open to anything that would be considered a play. As noted in the guidelines, we are currently not funding concerts, dance, sketch comedy, circus, storytelling evenings or other types of performance, except to the extent those elements may be part of your play.*

**8. Would IPI be open to funding a festival of short plays?** *Yes, if it's an independent undertaking.*

**9. What kinds of production costs is IPI willing to fund?** We ask projects to budget for people first. Since these are small grants, we assume the bulk of the money will therefore go toward stipends and fees, followed by space rental.

**10. Can the grant be used to re-mount shows previously produced by the same team, but now revised or never fully realized?** Yes, assuming it is an independent production, and a logical next step for the team or show.

**11. What is your approach to safety, equity, fairness in decision-making?** To quote our colleagues at the New England Foundation for the Arts, the National New Play Exchange and others, we would like to “support work that contributes to the cultural and aesthetic diversities of today’s theater. We value an equitable, diverse, and inclusive world, which we interpret as all people having fair access to the tools and resources they need to realize creative and community endeavors. We acknowledge structural inequities that have excluded individuals and communities from opportunity based on race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, class, age, language, culture, nation of origin, and geography, and strive to counter those inequities in our work. We expect the productions we support to be committed to ensuring spaces, structures, and processes free of racism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, misogyny, classism, or other bias.”

**12. Can a theater company be a co-sponsor of an independent production, even if they haven’t put it in their own season? For example, can a production be sponsored by BOTH an established theater company and the Independent Productions Initiative? If a**

*theater is to be listed as a sponsor or producer, then we would consider the show part of their programming and therefore not an independent production. An established theater company could, however, be supportive and helpful in numerous ways and simply thanked in your Acknowledgements. The purpose of IPI is to help enable work that is not already happening under the auspices of an existing 501c3, which would assumedly be doing its own fundraising.*

***13. Is there any exception for a production that is independent, but has a fiscal sponsor?***

*We're defining a fiscal agent as a service available to independent artists for securing and processing tax-deductible contributions. A fiscal agent typically provides this service at some sort of baseline fee, or percentage basis. Independent productions making use of a fiscal agent are allowable.*

*However for the purposes of this application, we are making a distinction between a fiscal agent and a fiscal sponsor. Some partnerships are much more involved than direct fiscal agent services. For example, if a fiscal agent organization is also providing additional venue support, artistic consulting, marketing support and other services it's likely the panel will consider that project less independent than others in the applicant pool. And if the fiscal agent happens to be a producing theater where an applicant is a member, that is yet another layer to consider.*

*There is no hard and fast rule, and we recommend transparency as artists complete their applications. Generally, our panel will be scrutinizing institutional relationships for each project, and evaluating applications on both their independent nature and feasibility.*

**14. Does getting an IPI grant mean Redtwist is automatically my fiscal sponsor for other money I might raise?** No. Our grant would simply be one more donation helping you to cover the costs of your production overall, however you are structuring it .

**15. Can I apply if I am a currently enrolled college student in a theater department, mounting an independent production but using school facilities? Could I apply if the production were outside school facilities?** Independent productions by theater artists over age 18 who happen to be students would be eligible to apply; we would not be able to fund schools or school productions.