



The Independent Productions Initiative is designed to channel funding and technical assistance to the many independent theater productions increasingly happening outside of conventional theater company seasons, creating opportunities for artists, reaching new audiences, and sparking new community connections. In addition to supporting artists and productions, the IPI *also drives revenue to established theaters* because these independent efforts are precisely those that rent stages, providing earned revenue that existing companies desperately need. Productions taking place elsewhere still provide established companies and the theater community overall with a resource that offers a pathway for experience and visibility for artists, helping to build their body of work.

The Initiative is a new model launched in response to changes and challenges affecting theater, from funding cuts to shrinking seasons. The Initiative helps to sustain theatrical pipelines and artist development during the challenges of the current moment, while also building a way to fund an entire track of theater in Chicago that continues to grow.

Teams of artists offering new talent and perspectives but *unconnected* to an ongoing company have extremely limited opportunities for production, which affects what shows and where shows get done, and by whom. With Redtwist Theatre providing fiscal sponsorship, the Independent Productions Initiative is able to accept donations and distribute supporting dollars and expertise to independent productions and artistic teams that may be producing in myriad spaces and alternate venues, and that do not otherwise have the benefit of securing contributions or production.

There are two ways we offer support: through providing GRANTS as outlined on the following pages to a select number of projects; and through serving as a FISCAL SPONSOR for projects that come with their own donors but need a tax exempt destination for gifts.

The brainchild of playwright L.C. Bernadine, the Initiative has been in fundraising and design mode since 2024, co-chaired by playwright Peter Handler and working closely with Redtwist Artistic Director Dusty Brown and a committee of volunteers. We are especially grateful for the visionary donors enabling us to move towards our start-up goal of \$100,000 for the pilot that will take place in 2025 and 2026.

IPI APPLICATION GUIDELINES

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. Our capacity is limited. 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
- 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 are free of racism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, misogyny, classism, or other bias.

As artists ourselves, we are trying to keep applications as simple as we can, while also being clear about priorities. Although we appreciate that there will always be questions and variations, at our current stage of development, we will need to adhere to the following requirements:

- A public performance must take place within 12 months of the grant received. We will put a link about your production on our website ,
- The performance must be within the City of Chicago.
- The project must submit a short report afterwards as to how it went. 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>) and by Chicago Theater Standards (<https://notinourhouseorg.wordpress.com/>)
- Agree that tickets will not exceed \$30 in cost, and productions will include at least one pay-what-you-can performance. Consideration for disabled and Deaf audience members/performers is important. There are resources on the 3Arts website offering guidance regarding audio description, ASL interpretation, etc.

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. We would love to give out more grants and larger grants, and at some point we will! But there are teams of theater artists working right now to make independent productions possible, so we want to begin. Therefore,

from money raised to date, a first round of grants will be distributed in 2025, and a second in 2026.

In our first round of grant distribution, we anticipate the following:

4-5 grants @ \$5,000
5-6 grants @ \$2,500
4-5 grants @ \$1,000
5 grants @ \$ 500

Process:

We ask applicants to keep in mind that this is money raised by Chicago theater community volunteers, and being allocated by 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 to help the theatre community overall. Decisions will be made based on the priorities listed on the previous page.

Timeline:

July 1st – Open for submissions
August 15– Application window closes
September– Decisions made; grant distribution can begin
By December 2026 – Your production completed.

If Funded:

Your coach/support specialist from Redtwist Theatre 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 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 Redtwist’s ticketing platform if desired; promotion on the IPI tab on Redtwist’s website page, and other benefits.

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NOTE: For projects that are not seeking grant support but are in need of a tax-exempt FISCAL SPONSOR for contributions already pledged or pending and earmarked for *specific* independent productions, contact us at independentartists@redtwist.org. An administrative fee of 7% on donations is charged for sponsorship services.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. Would IPI be open to funding a festival of short plays?

Yes, if it's an independent undertaking.

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. Can the production make money, with ticket sale profits going back to our team?

Yes, as long as revenue is applied to project costs, which would prioritize compensation to artists and team members. Funded projects will be asked to submit a financial report after the production.

9. 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. ”

10. 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 thanked in your Acknowledgements.

The purpose of this project 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.

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

Not at the moment, but if you would have applied otherwise, please let us know at independentartists@redtwist.org so that we can consider this in our future planning, as we grow.

12. 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 .

13. Can IPI serve as my fiscal sponsor if I get a grant from you? In other words, can I request BOTH a fiscal sponsorship *and* a grant?

No, at the moment we are keeping the two “services” separate. If you need a grant from us, feel free to apply at our portal. To be eligible, you would not be operating already with 501c3 nonprofit tax status. If selected, your project would be funded via Redtwist Theatre and treated like any other of their program expenses, via their 501c3.

If you need fiscal sponsorship for a production for which *you’re* fundraising or for which you already have donations committed, contact us at independentartists@redtwist.org.

14. 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.

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Co-Chairs

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Committee

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Kris Torkelson & Charles Twichell

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FIRST ROUND OF IPI DONATIONS to PROJECTS THAT APPLIED IN 2025

\$5,000 CRANIACS

by Dinah Berkeley

Producer: Jeremy Ohringer

By a Chicago playwright, about people fixated on whooping cranes including those who don crane puppet heads in order to teach abandoned young cranes how to fly.

\$5,000 HAIL MARY / MARIA

by RJ Silva

Producer: RJ Silva

By a Chicago playwright, set in a wrestling ring, a man sorts through his identity via the three Mary's in his life

\$5,000 LIVING COLOR FEST

Producer: Rashaad A. Bond

Showcase of work by early career BIPOC artists

\$5,000 APIARY

by Kate Douglas

Producer: Clinton Clark

An eco-thriller set in a future where wild honeybees are extinct but kept alive by humans

\$4,000 ANY REBELLION OF WILL

by S. L. Daniels

Producer: Larry Grimm

An absurdist dark comedy by a Chicago playwright about an aimless young man kicked out of his parents' home who returns with a mystical street performer

\$4,000 DIVE

by John Henry Roberts

Producer: Michaela Petro

By a Chicago playwright, a play inspired by American noir, set in a dive bar in 2010

\$2,500 SISTERS:

Some Theatrical Rituals About the Nunnery

by Susan Lersch

Producer: Erin Feldman

By a Chicago playwright, a play discovered in the Gerber Hart Archives about the intersection between Chicago Catholic and Queer communities in the '60s and '80s

\$2,500 MONDAY/THURSDAY

by William Brown & Andrew Hansen

Producer: William Brown

A new musical by Chicago theater artists set in small town West Virginia

\$2,500 ENGINE 18

Devised by Chicago performers

Producer: Sivan Spector

Set inside Chicago's oldest firehouse, an immersive piece about the firehouse ghosts

\$2,000 YOU DESERVE TO BE HERE

by Alex Lubischer

Producer: Alex Lubischer

A horror-comedy by a Chicago playwright set during an academic year at a fictional and haunted Ivy League school

\$2,000 GOD-SIP

By Kezia Waters

Producer: Kezia Waters

An afro-surrealist work that follows a religious community on the North Carolina coast

\$1,500 THE GROWN UPS

By The Tramp Collective

Producer: David Stobbe & Gabriela Diaz

a series of plays set outdoors around campfires

\$1,500 HERE ARE SOME PLAYS I LIKE

Producer: AJ Schwartz

Readings of "director's choice" plays involving multiple artists

\$1,000 YOUR DEI OFFICERS

by Jorge Silva & Nik Whitcomb

Producer: Jorge Silva

A Neo-Futurists style piece patterned after a corporate seminar

\$1,000 THE MEMORANDUM

by Vaclav Havel

Producer: Elliott Puckette

absurdist workplace comedy satirizing bureaucracy, written in 1965 by the famed Czech playwright

\$1,000 THE AMERICAN SATIRE FESTIVAL

Producer: Erik Schiller

Short plays by Chicago writers on the myth of American exceptionalism and other themes

\$500 CATACOMBS

by Katherine Gwyn

Producer: Katherine Gwynn

site-specific two-person queer play by Chicago playwright taking place in the bar Dorothy

\$500 THE NEW F-WORD

by Connor Konz, Danny Gadaj, Mo Less

Producer: Mo Less

Drawing from avant garde traditions, a comedic examination of the digitization of identity

\$500 RED SOLO CUPS

by B. Walker Sampson

Producer: Tatiana Pavela

Dangers during times of disconnection, this play follows what happens inside the minds of four wallflowers at a party

\$500 MATT & BEN

by Mindy Kalling & Brenda Withers

Producer: Madeline Hudson

Two women playing two men who have the opportunity of a lifetime dropped in their laps

\$500 IS THIS ALL THIS IS

by Dave Osmundsen

Producer: Maddy Shilts

staged reading of a new work uplifting trans voices and stories.

\$500 GROUNDED

by George Brant

Producer: Brent Ervin-Eickhoff

a military pilot's unexpected pregnancy gets her reassigned to operate military drones from a trailer in Nevada.

\$500 DUCK DUCK GREY GOOSE

by Greta Mae Geiser

Producer: Greta Mae Geiser

Staged reading by a Chicago playwright follows five characters navigating love, grief, and the repercussions of abuse.

