

Creating an Omaha Fringe Festival

Project Description:

In 1947, after World War II, Edinburgh created an arts festival called Edinburgh International Festival. Eight artists, not invited to perform, showed up anyway and began performing on the fringes of the festival. Each year after that more performers showed up to the festival performing on the fringes, until 1958 when the official Festival Fringe Society was created. When the constitution for the Festival Fringe was written, they made sure to keep the integrity of those first performers by guaranteeing the festival would be a space open to anyone willing to perform. Today, the Edinburgh Fringe Festival is the biggest Fringe Festival in the world. From their example, artists all over the world have gravitated towards festivals that celebrate the arts in a similar way.

A Fringe festival derives its name from those performers who began on the Fringes of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. These festivals are simply a place where artists of all types can come together and perform or show their art. The works are generally performance based, self produced and self funded. In some cases the performers are all theatre based, but in others the festival can consist of musicians, stand up comics, theatre shows, and visual arts. Some festivals are open access, some are lottery, some are juried and some are a mix. After Edinburgh, Fringe festivals began to show up all over the world. Currently, the World Fringe website states there are over 250 Fringe festivals in countries from Europe to Africa to Asia to America. They estimate that, "19 million people see approximately 170 thousand performers in 60,000 free and ticketed events. Over 8 million Fringe tickets are sold in over 6 thousand venues across the globe." That's a lot of brand new theatre being created and performed for audiences to enjoy.

For my research project, I am proposing to start a small Fringe festival as a part of Omaha Under the Radar, a nonprofit music and dance festival that has been operating in Omaha for the past six years. I have partnered with their organization to add theatre performances to their festival. The purpose of this festival is to give local theatre artists a space where they can perform and experiment with theatre without having to pay large fees.

Activities, Process, and Methodology:

My research will focus on answering the following question: "Can the Omaha theatre and arts community support a Fringe Festival every summer?" I will use the amount of applications, the amount of audience attendance, the amount of performers, the amount of money I can raise, and the types of performances to determine the success of the festival and to answer the question. My ultimate purpose with this project is to determine if this type of theatre festival can be supported yearly. If so, my goal is to make this festival into my full-time job. I have spent time researching other festivals like this and many markets support this type of festival. For example, Greensboro, North Carolina (a similar sized market) has been supporting a Fringe festival since 2003. Their festival has brought recognition to local artists and helped create vibrancy in their downtown. For future festivals, I will move our venues to theatres throughout Omaha in an effort to get people moving and exploring Omaha. In addition, I would hope that my festival can also bring recognition to Omaha theatre artists. Given time, I would like to grow it into a larger festival that can support artists and that will bring more theatre to the Omaha area.

This first festival will consist of at least eight productions that will run multiple times over the course of four days. Each production will have at least four performances. All acts will be determined by an open call. There will be no restrictions on who can apply for the first year, and the eight slots were determined by a lottery. All shows that get into the festival must be original content. The productions will supply their own actors, director, scenery, costumes, etc. They will also be in charge of their own marketing. The festival will supply some marketing in the form of a festival program showcasing each production and through the festival website, but any marketing outside of that would be supplied by the

productions. The festival will supply a tech person, or the money to hire a tech person connected to the venue. Each production will have 60 minutes to perform with a ten minute set up and ten minute strike before and after the performance. Each production will also have the chance to rehearse in the space with the tech person either on the day before the festival begins or sometime during the day of the performance depending on availability of the venue.

Project Timeline:

In November I posted an open call for applications for the festival and created a social media presence. There was positive feedback and excitement from everyone in the community. I began looking for venue options, starting with UNO's theatre space, as this project will be a part of my thesis project. During this time frame I began working with Cindy Phaneuf, my faculty advisor and project mentor. Her role has been to help me think through all the moving pieces of a project like this. In addition, she has helped me to think through my budget and work with UNO to use their space for the festival. While I am entirely in charge of all aspects of this project and its research, she helped me get started with my research, and has continued to give advice and support as needed.

In December I created an advisory committee of people who work with and know the theatre community in Omaha. They are Cindy Phaneuf, my faculty advisor; Lara Marsh, a fellow grad student and director/stage manager; Beaufield Barry, a playwright and producer; and Amy Lane, a faculty member at Creighton and director. Each of them has their own strengths that they bring to the table, and they have been invaluable in guiding me through the process of creating this festival.

In January, the application closed, and I confirmed the space at UNO for the first festival. I received over 25 applications from people wishing to perform in the festival. I also launched a logo contest to create a brand for the festival. In February I held the lottery and awarded the eight slots to eight different performing companies. I reached out to all the artists, confirmed their availability for the festival and signed a contract with each group.

In March, April and May I will be fundraising for the festival. There will need to be a significant amount of money raised to pay stage managers and lights and sound engineers. The fundraisers will vary based on need. For example, I am starting with a Kickstarter campaign. From there I will network and create a pool of donors. I will be applying to the Nebraska Arts Council for a mini-grant to help pay some of the venue costs. Please, note, I am not requesting this grant pay for any of the venue costs or any of the staff stipends.

In June and July I'll be getting ready for the festival. This will require a lot of my time as I verify artists, create the program, start marketing the festival to audiences, train my volunteers, answer artist concerns and questions, prepare the venue, and sell tickets. The festival itself will consist of two days of technical rehearsals, and four days of performances.

Detailed Timeline:

Date	Event	To Be Accomplished
May	Hire and Recruit Personnel	Meet with stage managers and light/sound designers. Complete any necessary training
May - July	Sell Tickets	Create an online ticket platform and sell tickets; Track all the tickets so the artists can be paid from the box office revenue

June	Pre-Festival Preparations	Print t-shirts, train volunteers, print buttons, create program, confirm artists, market the festival through various media options
June 3-8	Artist Workshops	Meet with artists to help them understand the constraints of a Fringe festival.
July 14-20	Artist check-in	Make sure artists are ready for the festival. Confirm everything once more
July 22-23	Tech Rehearsals	Each show gets in the space at UNO to run through their tech and rehearse one time.
July 24-27	Festival	Four days of performances, work with the artists, help audience members, continue marketing the festival, keep track of all money raised, set up and clean up.
August	Festival Wrap up	Work on filing grant reports, distribute artists funds, send out all thank you's
September	Project evaluation	Evaluate project and start planning and prepping for the 2020 Fringe Festival

Student/Faculty Roles:

My role will be to set up, organize and run the festival. I will be in charge of the day-to-day operations namely notifying the artists of their acceptance, working with them to confirm schedules, all publicity and marketing of the festival, all fundraising activities, and all festival wrap up and project evaluation.

The primary role of my faculty member will be to advise me in my different responsibilities. We will meet regularly to determine my progress on the project, and she will help give direction on next steps. She will also help me make contacts in the theatre community in Omaha and act as my advocate for use of the UNO theatre department's space.

Tamar Neumann, UNO Theatre Graduate Student, Omaha Fringe Festival Director
Cindy Phaneuf, UNO Theatre Faculty, Project Mentor

Proposed Budget:

As stated above, all the money to pay the festival costs will be raised through fundraisers and donations. I am requesting this grant as a stipend to pay myself for the work I will be doing as I create and manage the Fringe Festival. My full-time job is as an adjunct English teacher. This grant will help me take the summer off from teaching and dedicate my full attention to the success of this festival.

Rationale for Stipend Request: I will be spending time outside of regular academic hours preparing and running this festival. An average graduate student makes \$20 an hour. During the months of May-August I will be working almost full-time running the festival.

Estimated hours outside of UNO Academic year beginning May 2nd

May	Recruiting and Paperwork	30 hours
June	Festival Prep	80 hours
July	Festival Prep/Running the Festival	100 hours
August	Festival wrap up	20 hours
September	Project evaluation/2020 Start	20 hours
	Total	250 hours

Stipend request: \$5,000.

February 20, 2019

Dear GRACA Review Committee,

It is my pleasure to write this letter of support for Tamar Neumann's GRACA proposal. I have known Tamar for two years and find that she has the background, drive and tenacity to complete her project of creating an Omaha Fringe Festival for theatre artists.

Tamar's objectives and methodology are rooted in the international tradition of fringe festivals. She is well underway with the conception and advertising of this new opportunity in Omaha theatre. She has researched comparable festivals and created a workable framework for Omaha. She has also networked with leaders of the field and connected with UNDER THE RADAR artists who currently have a fringe festival in Dance and Music. Responses to her ideas have been overwhelmingly positive.

Tamar's budget is reasonable as she will spend five months setting up, administering, and completing follow up work for the Omaha Fringe. These responsibilities will be full time, making it nearly impossible to work another job. She will be raising the money for the venue costs and personnel through grants, a kickstarter campaign, and individual donations. She will also handle all follow-up reports and distribution of funds to artists.

As Tamar's mentor, I will advise her on the set up of the Fringe, open doors for contacts, help supervise the running of the festival and serve as a reader for grants and follow-up reports. I am also an advocate for her use of UNO Theatre spaces for the Fringe. When the Fringe is complete, I will help her analyze the viability and interest in continuing the Fringe into an ongoing festival.

Tamar comes to UNO with an MA in English and a teaching history in community colleges in Minnesota. She has written reviews for theatre productions in Minneapolis. She now teaches English at Metro Community College and writes play reviews for THE READER. She was an active participant in the Minneapolis Fringe and brings these experiences to her work in setting up the Omaha Fringe. Tamar is intelligent, well organized and works in a systematic way to achieve her goals. I have no doubt she will complete this project in an impressive and inspiring manner, offering artists and audiences an opportunity to see original works in new ways.

If I can provide additional information, please contact me.

Sincerely,



Cindy Melby Phaneuf, Ph.D.
Professor of Theatre
School of the Arts