



January 20, 2021

Sue Gens, Executive Director

Sean Dowse, Board Chair Minnesota State Arts Board

540 Fairview Avenue North,

Suite 304 Saint Paul, MN 55104

Dear Ms. Gens and Mr. Dowse:

I am writing to you today to enter a formal comment and to **strongly object** to the rule change the Minnesota State Arts Board is seeking around definitions of “unincorporated nonprofit association,” as a category of applicants eligible for funding through the MSAB. This proposed change is both legally unnecessary and incorrect, and would undermine the stated mission and goals of the MSAB.

Persistent Theatre Productions opposes the proposed rule change and proposed definition of “unincorporated nonprofit association” on practical and philosophical grounds, and we believe that it undercuts the stated vision of the MSAB of “an arts industry that is an integral part of Minnesota’s economy.” Persistent Theatre Productions has been in Springboard for the Arts’ Incubator Program since 2017. We are a very small theatre company with a volunteer artistic staff of four and annual budgets of less than \$5,000. We do not have the funds or the resources yet to become a 501c3 non-profit. We depend on our fiscal sponsorship status with Springboard for the Arts to receive Minnesota state-funded grants. We have been “dark,” meaning we have not been able to produce any shows, for all of 2020. Due to the global pandemic it is not possible for theatre to operate safely right now. I find it particularly sickening to know that once it is safe for us to operate, having barely survived this pandemic as such a small theatre group, that we would no longer be eligible for state funded grants if the new rules were to pass. It is only possible for us to produce one show per season due to how small we are and we readily depend upon state arts grants. If this rule is to pass we very well may cease to exist at all.

You may wonder what significance a small theatre company would even have for the arts industry in Minnesota. You should know that small arts groups and theatre companies are just as vitally important as larger ones, for you simply cannot have a flourishing arts community with only large arts groups. In 2019, Persistent Theatre Productions was the recipient of the MRAC community arts grant for \$5,000, which allowed us to produce the play, *When We Were Young*



and *Unafraid* by Sarah Treem — a powerful play about women surviving domestic abuse. During this production we partnered with Tubman, a local organization that provides numerous services for women and children experiencing domestic violence, and had local advocates come in and educate the audiences on domestic abuse. We also partnered with local women artists who displayed art that empowered women in a gallery attached to the theatre space we rented. This show ran for three weeks and while we had a small house of only forty five, we filled it almost every show and it directly impacted our audiences by educating them about domestic violence and giving them the needed resources to make a difference. We would not have been able to have the groundbreaking partnerships on this production without the MRAC grant. We also would not have been able to produce a play of artistic excellence without the grant.

While \$5,000 may not seem like much money, it allowed us to hire qualified talented designers, who were able to create professional sets and costumes, and actors who played the roles with excellence. Most importantly, it allowed us to pay our artists, even though small amounts, some money for their work. The money we make in ticket sales and fundraising is significantly less than what a state arts grant could provide us and it is not enough to produce high quality theatre. If we are to rely solely on ticket sales and fundraising efforts, it also makes it virtually impossible for us to grow both artistically and financially. Putting all of our focus on fundraising and sales while being such a small group of four takes all of our energy and effort away from the artistic and community aspects of a show, and from the overall quality.

Aside from directly impacting the community and producing works of artistic excellence, Persistent Theatre Productions has also, in the three short years of our operation, given many artists massive career growth. We have hired many actors and designers who were just starting out, looking to make their break into the Twin Cities theatre scene, and went onto work at larger theatre companies such as TRP, The Guthrie, and the History Theatre. Building up one's resume with smaller theatre companies is almost always the path to working at larger theatre companies such as the Guthrie. At Persistent Theatre Productions we put on work of excellency that allows theatre artists to grow, explore their craft, and help build their resumes. Most importantly, Persistent Theatre Productions is about women in theatre changing how we all relate in the world, one untold story at a time. We only produce plays written by women and about women, and we make every effort to prioritize hiring women directors, designers, and actors. This is because in American theatre, women are vastly underemployed compared to men, especially female designers, playwrights and directors. Taking away our eligibility to receive Minnesota



State Arts Grants is taking away women's stories from the Twin Cities stages. I strongly urge you to reconsider these rules changes that will directly impact our company as well as countless others and potentially make us close down forever.

Sincerely,

Meggie Greivell

Artistic Director of Persistent Theatre Productions