



*Janis A. Barlow & Associates*

Research, Planning and Management Consultants  
Specializing in Theatre since 1981

# **STEPS IN THEATRE PROJECT PLANNING**

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION TO THE THEATRE PROJECT PLANNING PROCESS**

The following steps are a brief summary of the stages of a theatre project. They are a framework for theatre planning based on conventional business and project management models. The plan itself is a tool, a snapshot in time which is the basis for action, communication and replanning the project as is necessary. The plan must be inherently flexible and responsive to ever changing conditions. Progress is not always consecutive; more often it is cyclical and with each step the previous phases may have to be reviewed.

Historic theatre preservation, restoration and adaptive reuse are all subspecialties of the theatre project design. An historic theatre inevitably requires additional research, time and expertise to produce and implement a successful rehabilitation plan, but the following steps would apply to either a new or historic theatre building project.

## **2.0 PRELIMINARY PLANNING - PROJECT POTENTIAL**

### **2.1 Research and Goal Setting**

Who or what is driving the demand for a theatre? Is it a user in search of a space, a space in search of a use, or a response to a gap in the community's cultural infrastructure?

It is very important to focus on the mission of the organization and to document the guiding assumptions. Are its project goals cultural, heritage or economic? Is its strategic focus arts or entertainment? Are there specific program goals and conditions? What is the core business - Will it produce, present or rent to fulfill its goals?

Previous building or programming studies should be reviewed and the history of demand chronicled. All existing site documentation should be assembled. Supplementary on-site research and testing will be required during the development of design drawings.

Many of these consultations may be undertaken on an informal basis, taking advantage of professional resources available locally, through government agencies or through the Development Advisory Program of the LHAT.

### **2.2 Professional and Community Consultations**

Preliminary consultations with experienced professionals should provide a cursory assessment of viability. Consultations with key community stakeholders (patrons and opinion makers), facility users (clients), and some form of research into the market (customers) should be undertaken by these objective, independent experts in theatre planning, management and design.

## **2.3 Financial Planning**

Key funding sources should be identified, and a rough cash flow projected for capital, project administration and operating expenditures. By this stage of the project, it is important to identify any and all sources of funds for planning or technical assistance for your project.

## **2.4 Site Selection or Stabilization and Security**

Site suitability is measured by many factors: size, access, visibility, location, utilities and neighbourhood services are some of the criteria.

Before there is any commitment to acquire, build or rehabilitate on site, there should be a series of site specific engineering assessments undertaken.

If adaptive reuse or rehabilitation of existing buildings are involved, then stabilization and security must be considered.

## **2.5 The Project Management Plan**

If the project seems potentially viable, this next step is a series of tasks to methodically study, replan and document the project. With the assistance of independent, professional expertise, all the elements of a successful enterprise can be defined, assessed, analyzed, extrapolated, selected and implemented. The project management planning process addresses, in very specific detail, the basic organizational questions:

**What are the goals of the project?  
How are they to be accomplished?**

On the following pages, project planning tasks, including the comprehensive feasibility study, are described in greater detail. Once the planning process is complete, the project enters into implementation steps which include:

- Consultant Selection
- User Group Survey
- Building Program, Design Development, Specifications and Tendering
- Financial Re-Planning
- Fund Raising, Marketing, Programming and Construction
- OPENING! ....Programming, Operations (and Financial Planning....)

### **3.0 THE PROJECT MANAGEMENT PLAN**

#### **3.1 Establish a Project Steering Committee and Identify a Project Manager**

The Steering Committee, which may evolve into the nucleus of a Board of Trustees or Management of the theatre, should be comprised of the owner's representatives or community representatives who have a stake in the theatre and can direct the progress of the project. This Steering Committee may also be known as a Building or Design Advisory Committee depending upon the status of the organization leading the project. It is also important that at any given time, there is one individual responsible for project management, coordination and liaison, and expectations are clear.

#### **3.2 Undertake a Strategic Planning Workshop**

With the assistance of an objective, experienced facilitator, the Committee should develop a preliminary mission statement for the theatre. This statement may include the theatre's purpose, program goals and assumptions, and at this phase, outline a set of project goals, conditions, and design criteria for the building.

The direction of the project will be governed by the overall mission and goals, but the project itself has to define its own set of conditions, objectives and strategies to serve the mission. A theatre consultant who can facilitate planning and the following tasks may be contracted until staff are retained, or the workshop may be undertaken as part of the feasibility study.

#### **3.3 Develop Terms of Reference for a Feasibility Study**

In order for the community to be assured of the viability of the project, and to qualify for funding through government agencies or private foundations, a feasibility study must be undertaken by an objective professional. A number of issues are assessed and analyzed in order to develop a building program and design proposal. These typically include:

- Community needs and market demand
- Facility ownership and management
- Financial seed money and cashflow management
- Project positioning - credibility and urgency
- Fund raising campaign potential, lead gift
- Nature of future subsidies
- Economic impact studies

Typical phases of a comprehensive feasibility study are outlined on the following page. The terms of each feasibility study can be modified to suit the decision-making needs of the project and the resources available.

## **FOUR PHASES OF FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT**

### **Phase I: Research and Preliminary Assessment**

1. Demographics Summary
2. Local Activity Data
3. Environmental and Architectural Data
4. Site Options (to establish cost/benefit)
5. Supply Data (inventory of competitive facilities)
6. Demographic Analyses of Demand
7. Prospective User Groups
8. Market Study and Needs Assessment
9. Summary and Preliminary Program Suggestions

### **Phase II: Program Analysis**

1. Use Program, Policies, Management, Event Calendar
2. Mission review, Design Criteria, Building Program
3. Furniture, Fixtures and Equipment
4. Conceptual Drawings
5. Estimates of Probable Cost

### **Phase III: Resource Analysis**

1. Funding Options
2. Ownership/Governance/Management Options
3. Operations Plan
4. Annual Budgets
5. Economic Impact Analysis

### **Phase IV: Synthesis Phase**

1. Action Plan
2. Critical Path
3. Preliminary Terms for Property Purchase, Lease or License
4. Management Organizational Structures
5. Market Plan

The first feasibility study may be followed by an architectural feasibility study or master plan and a fund raising feasibility, depending upon the specific needs of the project.

### **3.4 Write the Theatre's Business Plan**

Drawn from the mission planning process and feasibility study, a Business Plan for the theatre may be extrapolated, addressing the following:

- Mission Statements and Company Profile
- Community Needs/Industry Trends
- Marketing Plan
- Operating Policies
- Human Resources
- Financial Plan

The mission statements are the basis for the Business Plan and ongoing programs. A succinct Business Plan which summarizes project viability will be required by many individuals and foundations as a prerequisite to making a donation.

(The Project Management Plan is a variation of a business plan which is focused on the delivery of a project.)

### **3.5 Ratify Project Goals and Operating Structure**

Initially, the project management plan is a guide governed by mission statements which include project goals, conditions, design criteria and an organizational structure devised to accomplish project goals. Project conditions should include deadlines (if relevant) and budget constraints.

A proposed management structure (for project design and construction only) is appended. The Steering Committee is responsible for governance of the project while the project and design teams are headed by the Project Manager. The organization chart should be expanded to include project research, marketing, fund raising and administrative personnel/consultants and notes on operating policy and accountability.

### **3.6 Develop Comprehensive Terms of Reference and Selection Criteria for Project Personnel and Consultants**

Providing clearly defined terms of reference for all project personnel is the best way to be assured that the Steering Committee is getting the best possible value for the money expended. A well organized, well briefed and highly qualified team will operate more efficiently and be more motivated to generate options and creative solutions necessary to achieve project goals.

### **3.7 Draft an Integrated Action Plan for the Project**

The Action Plan should integrate the step by step, critical path of the construction aspects of the project to reach its opening goal as well as concurrent activities with respect to administration, fund raising, marketing, bookings, special event planning and other milestones.

### **3.8 Produce Preliminary Cash Flow Projections**

Based on all the information gathered and the planning ratified to date, as well as estimates of project revenues, expenses and scheduling, provide cashflow projections for capital and project administration costs for review by the Committee.

Cash flow options may include conducting the project on a "cash in, cash out" basis, or pledges may be used to guarantee loans. Once the financing approach is approved, the project management plan may be assembled.

#### **SUMMARY OF COMPONENTS IN THE PROJECT MANAGEMENT PLAN**

- Mission Statements and Program Goals
- Project Goals and Design Criteria
- Conditions (Deadlines, Budgets, Issues to be resolved)
- Marketing Strategies (Derived from Fund Raising Report)
- Operating Structure (Organizational Chart)
- Project Team (Job Descriptions)
- Action Plan (and Critical Path)
- Financing Plan (Cashflow Projections)
- Building Program and Architectural Plan (to be developed)

Planning and replanning will continue through the life of the project and the building, but implementation begins with the commitment to design development and construction.

### **3.9 Contract Project Consultants**

The preceding tasks should be completed in order that the Steering Committee and Project Management staff are in the best position to select their design team and direct their work most efficiently. The Business Plan of the theatre and the Project Management Plan are essential background information for the consultants.

Some of the design team may be the same professionals who have assisted in the preliminary feasibility and planning studies and tasks. Continuity is important but it can also be in the client's interest to have separate contracts with their consultants for each phase.

## 4.0 IMPLEMENTATION

### 4.1 Consultant Selection

As a general rule, the Steering Committee will be assured of the consulting services which best serve the needs of the project if the Committee follows the following steps:

- prepares a set of terms of reference;
- prepares a draft contract;
- prequalifies a selection of recommended candidates;
- invites proposals which have quantifiable and qualitative bases for comparison;
- interviews three qualified candidates;
- investigates references;
- judges on the basis of qualifications rather than lowest fee; and
- selects a candidate conditional upon successful negotiation of the contract.

The **Theatre Design Team** is often comprised of two or more Architects (the Design Principal and Project Architect), Construction Management and a Restoration Consultant or Interior Designer. The first consultant to be contracted should be the **Architectural Design Principal**.

The **Design Principal** should have specific training and experience in theatre projects, (and restoration if applicable). Specialty consultants such as theatre and acoustic consultants should be named as part of the Design Principal's team. In many communities, there are not architects with highly specialized skills in the planning and design of professional caliber theatres. When an outside Design Principal is retained, the Principal usually seeks a Project Architect from the community rather than appoint one from their own firm.

The local **Project Architect** should be selected by the Owner, Steering Committee and/or the Design Principal and should be based in the area. Ideally, their experience should include public assembly buildings. They should be a full service firm with comprehensive knowledge of local codes, authorities having jurisdiction, local trades, suppliers and resources.

Normal engineering consultants such as structural, mechanical and electrical may be named on the Design Principal's team together with the specialty consultants or selected together with the local Project Architect.

The Committee, Design Principal and Project Architect should select the **Construction Management**. Construction Management should be a contracting firm with experience in building, scheduling, expediting and phasing complex projects. It is helpful if the firm is local and experienced in public assembly buildings.

The **Interior Designer** is a decorative specialist with specific experience in the interior of theatres. This Consultant may be selected by the Design Architect to recommend colour schemes, patterns and fabrics. In an historic theatre project, a Restoration Consultant may be retained to research, analyze and recommend a decorative scheme according to the rehabilitation philosophy of the project.

## **4.2 User Group Survey**

The next step requires that the Architects canvas key user groups for their specific requirements of the building, which they will assemble into a building program governed by the program and project mission statements and design criteria developed by the Steering Committee.

## **4.3 Building Program, Design Development, Specifications and Tendering**

The Consultants will undertake site research and develop conceptual floor plans and cost estimates for approval by the Committee before proceeding with schematic drawings, design development, working drawings and tender documents, and further cost estimates.

## **4.4 Financial Re-Planning**

With the refinement of drawings and specifications and the imposition of actual market conditions at the time of tendering, more accurate estimates of the total project cost can be assembled together with a more accurate construction and cash flow schedule. Financial reviews and re-planning are required on a regular basis.

## **4.5 Fund Raising, Marketing, Programming and Construction**

These four management functions will continue simultaneously, albeit with shifting emphasis at different stages, through the life of the project and the building.

## **4.6 OPENING! ....Programming, Operations (and Financial Planning....)**

## **4.7 Last Words**

*"No matter how much wisdom may go into planning,... the measure of its success always will be in the spirit and mettle of the individuals engaged in its execution.*

*No matter how much treasure may support a project, or how elaborate its organization, or how detailed and farsighted its operational scheme, the human element is always the central one."*

*- Dwight D. Eisenhower*

## 5.0 THEATRE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT -- PHASE ONE

### 5.1 Proposed Project Organization Chart

