What It Takes to Thrive:
An overview analysis of the key factors that contribute to a community theater's
success

by
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To my grandmother, Frances Patrick Clark

Thank you for teaching me what it means to be a lifelong learner.

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ABSTRACT

This research project conducts an overview analysis of two non-profit community theaters in the U.S. in order to determine what factors of business contribute most to their success (as defined by increase in ticket sales revenue and longevity of the theater). Background research has been conducted in order to gain a better understanding of the field, and from this, five key factors have been proposed to have significant impact on the success of community theaters: steadfast core values and maintained alignment with those values, cultivation of a strong, clearly defined staff and volunteer organization, an understanding that connections and partnerships are crucial to success, actions that work to join community conversation rather than drive it, and prioritization of active programming that meets community needs. After presentation of the data, the proposed key factors are discussed in terms of confirmation or rejection by the study data.

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INTRODUCTION

When most people think of business students and their destinations after college, the dramatic arts are usually not what come to mind. While the arts hold great merit and are important to society, they are rarely thought of as being a field that holds tightly to rigorous business practices. This, however, is the narrative I would like to challenge in this research. Having grown up in the arts and cultivated my passion for business in the last four years, I see great potential for a marriage between the two.

I have seen what the arts can do. I have seen the ability of the performing arts to turn a shy child into one who comes alive and emotes bigger than anyone else on the stage. I have seen it give someone the ability to express their personal emotions through those of a character. I have seen it engage people in conversations that mean something - something deep that could not be accessed without the power of arts and their ability to pull thoughts and feelings to the surface. I have seen it unite people that otherwise would have very little to connect them. I have seen the epic collaboration that happens as a result of people that are very different working together. I have seen the healing power that comes from working towards something together with a team. I have seen the effects of people feeling empowered by the support of their peers and their found ability to tell a story that matters.

And I know the power of business. I know that solid team organization and protocol has the ability to create space for artistry in a given craft. I know that a strong "why" can be the difference between powering through a tough season and giving up, just when things were about to get good. I know that a leader who takes the time to set up systems that support their subordinates can be the difference between an employee

working toward a cause that feels worthy and just coming into work in order to put food on the table. I know that a business with a worthy cause and the capability to back it up puts out a worthy product… and that product affects others… who affect others.

This is where this project comes into play. I have seen what the arts can do, I know the power of business, and I understand what the marriage of those two can mean. Successfully marrying the world of performing arts and business enables theater companies to harness and exploit the capabilities of business in order to further expose the world to the power of the arts. So often in the arts, people understand the latter, but do not know how to apply the former. I know that there is much to be applied from the business world into the arts world. While this project could very well be (and is for some) a lifetime endeavor, for the purposes of this project, I simply want to look at some things that have been done well in theaters that are succeeding in their craft as a business. I want to see what key factors these businesses have that are actively contributing to their success, as well as to their past and projected longevity. While this project is not comprehensive to the subject, I am hoping it will shed some light on specific factors and pave the way for a deeper study when the time is right.

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

For this project, it was important to not only draw from written sources, but also from first-person interviews in order to gain a fuller and current understanding from the opinions of experts in the field. Throughout the research, many factors arose, with each source taking a slightly different view on the priorities that should be present within

business operations. The following key factors were highlighted again and again as being significant to a theater's success.

1. Steadfast core values and a strong alignment of actions to these values.

Throughout the research, sources referred to the necessity for a company to have a steadfast hold on their core values in order to properly drive the company in a consistent and clear direction. In *Built to Last*, the written results of a six-year study between visionary companies and their comparisons (see full list in Appendix A), authors Jim Collins and Jerry Porras introduce the concept of "clock building" rather than "time telling" as a method of strategy and organization within a company. While this speaks largely to the personnel culture within a company by analogizing one that teaches their employees how to be self-starters and be able to appropriately see and implement the company's vision, it stands upon the foundation that such staff organization cannot exist without clear values and goals to which they can ascribe and aim. Former theater administrator Donald Fann (The Arts Center of Cannon County) expounds further upon the core value concept by expressing the cruciality that an action plan be prepared in conjunction with the core values. He explains that while goals and values are important, they mean absolutely nothing without a plan for specific steps to enact them. Without a plan for the daily, monthly, or even yearly steps necessary, how can anyone expect a big, five-year goal to be achieved? *Built to Last* takes this concept one step further by teaching that the most successful companies are those who learn how to balance the act of holding unswervingly to those values and that of being flexible enough to take the auxiliary parts of the company - those things *other* than the core values - and change

them according to situational and societal needs. This point is corroborated further by the need for flexibility in a community theater in order to meet the needs of those the theater is serving, particularly the artists working to produce the theatrical content.

2. Cultivate a strong, clearly defined staff and volunteer organization.

Stemming off the factor pertaining to core values comes the need for defined organization of staff and volunteers. Once again, *Built to Last* makes strong points to this end, referring to the clock building vs. time telling analogy for a business. The "time teller" in this case refers to a strong leader who clearly sees the vision and direction for the company and then inspires everyone else to work to achieve the vision. Collins and Porras argue, however, that while a controlling leader may well be effective for a time, that type of authority rarely sees success past the first few transfers of power of that position. Such leadership creates an atmosphere in which the company is dependent on the leader for direction and vision, rather than being able to lean on the vision that is woven into the very fabric of the company. As such, vision and drive within the company tend to die within the next few generations of leadership. As the original leader of the company leaves the position and fades from immediate memory, the motivational fire often does as well. In answer to this, Collins and Porras propose an alternate type of organization, one which teaches each of its employees (through the establishment of strong hierarchies and infrastructure), to be able to "tell time" themselves. This not only aids in the forward progress of the company in its current season, but also carries that momentum forward to the next one. This same idea is reinforced in the first chapter of Jim Cavanaugh's textbook *Organization and Management of Non-Professional Theatre*

by his urging of prospective theater managers to clearly define the hierarchy within a company. This gives employees and volunteers a rock-solid understanding of who their superiors are and who to go to for guidance when necessary. Michael Gerber's book *The E-myth Revisited* ("*E-myth*") responds to this point in kind, with *E-myth* making the point that a company can still clearly define all roles within itself, even if the company is, as yet, too small to fill all of the roles with individuals. By taking the time to establish hierarchy and job descriptions early on, a company saves itself a lot of hassle later in its life.

3. Connections and partnerships are crucial.

Next on the list of key points is using personal connections and building solid, lasting partnerships to support and strengthen a business. Vanessa Becker Weig (Founder of Voices Amplified) stressed this throughout her interview, detailing the countless projects that she has been a part of as Education Director of several theaters throughout her career. Speaking specifically to partnerships, Weig emphasized the importance of being brave and knocking on doors to start conversations with potential partners. Essentially, "the more you reach out and the more partnerships that you create, the more buzz is created" (Weig). So much of business is about networking, and especially in the arena of community theater. Connections often will come from seemingly random conversations or from intentional introductions in unlikely places. Weig also explained that with regards to funding, foundations are nearly always more interested in a company that has programs dedicated to education than in one who does not. However, programs (particularly long-term ones) are expensive to start and maintain. As such, establishing

dependable partnerships is a key way that companies can facilitate those large programs. In another interview, Jon Royal reinforced this factor in his discussion of the importance of community (to be unpacked in more detail in the next section.) Royal, too, stated the importance of partnerships by highlighting the direct relationship between having authentic, organic conversation with members of the community and the potential for great partnerships to form.

4. Don't start the conversation; join it.

Following the importance of partnerships is the idea proposed in interview by Jon Royal: Don't start the conversation; join it. This concept is perhaps one that is related more specifically to theater and community work than to business in general. Approaching the subject as an artist and social activist, Royal pointedly addressed the construct in western culture which assumes that a community tends to revolve heavily around an arts center, rather than the arts center actively working to serve those in the community (as opposed to just making money by whatever means necessary). Royal spoke of a trend in which theaters assume that they are the entity that sparks social conversations, rather than seeing the arts themselves as the conversation (whatever that conversation might be). To combat this, Royal proposes a model in which theaters work hard to *listen* before speaking themselves, in order that they might participate in the conversations that are important to the community and then let the art produced "roll from *that* [emphasis his]" (Royal). In much the same way, this topic showed itself in conversation with Vanessa Weig when she talked about the need for flexibility when working on community projects. Like Royal, she understands that community theaters

ought to be community-driven. As such, working around the schedules of those participants within the community is crucial to its success. (Without the participation of these people, the theater cannot operate). Because most participants in community theater are not professionals, it is imperative that the theater be prepared to accommodate life schedules among their artists. "We had to meet them where they were" Weig said of a group of young mothers that participated in one of her programs (Weig).

5. Prioritizing active programming that caters to the needs of your community.

Lastly, and once again related to the previous key factors is the concept of prioritizing appropriate programming. While programming is undoubtedly already a priority for most community organizations, there can sometimes be the temptation in an organization to brainstorm programs based on what the team *thinks* a community needs, rather than actually catering programs to the needs of the community. As an organization that hopes to become a pillar within a community, it is crucial to ensure that each program being created is done with careful consideration, taking into account the conversations happening (described above) and the expressed interests of those who are likely to be participating in such programs. Once again, Vanessa Weig was a huge proponent of this in her interview. Particularly in her work as education director, Weig saw the fruits of programming in the form of increased interest in the theater. "Any theater that doesn't think that education and outreach is where it's at, they are *sorely* mistaken [emphasis hers]" (Weig). Not only is this important from an outreach and service standpoint, but practically it also carries much weight in regard to the financial aspect of the theater. It stands to reason that when a business listens to its customers and delivers goods and

services according to their wishes, then their sales will likely be higher than a theater who acts based on its own reasoning and staff's personal preferences. In the world of the arts, this thinking is not necessarily true since some programs may be deemed beneficial but might not generate very much revenue, hence the need of theaters for supplemental funding through donations and grants. However, as is evident by the persistence of the arts to exist in communities through bouts of economic hardship and loss, continually choosing to act in service of the community garners support and aids in the longevity of theaters.

DEFINITION OF SUCCESS

Defining success in any field is a precarious business because it is such a subjective term. When defined by Merriam-Webster, success is simply "a favorable or desirable outcome." In an article written by Michael J. Mauboussin in the Harvard Business Review, Mauboussin asks readers to consider two basic questions when determining success: "What is your objective?" and "What factors will help you achieve that objective?" (Mauboussin par. 12). In the case of a community theater company, it can be assumed that the main objective of the business is to spread its individual mission (this will vary between companies) through the public viewing of the art it produces. How then can that objective be achieved? There could be many methods that a theater company uses to reach an audience and spread its mission, including increasing the marketing budget, increasing the volunteer count, increasing sponsorships, etc. While these are all factions of a business that could be turned into key performance indicators for the company and measured, these three examples do not give the clearest or most

direct picture of whether a theater is succeeding in reaching more people and spreading its mission. As such, "success" will be defined in this project with two main indicators: the increase shown in the ticket sales of the theater (a common revenue stream) and the overall longevity or lifespan of the theater. Together, these two indicators give a picture of the number of patrons that the theater is reaching from year to year (with each ticket sale representing a person who is getting to experience the mission of the theater first hand) as well as the theater's ability to withstand the test of time.

PROPOSITIONS

From research, it was apparent that there are far more potential key success factors than can reasonably fit into a thesis while still allowing room for discussion of each. However, as discussed in the previous sections, there are five of these key factors that emerged across the sources:

- Proposition 1: Successful theaters will establish steadfast core values and work to maintain alignment with those values.

- Proposition 2: Successful theaters will work to cultivate a strong, clearly defined staff and volunteer organization.

- Proposition 3: Successful theaters will act with the understanding that connections and partnerships are crucial.

- Proposition 4: Successful theaters will strive to *join* the conversations within the community rather than presume that their work will *start* them.

- Proposition 5: Successful theaters will prioritize active programming that caters to the needs of their community.

This research proposes, then, that as the analysis of the subject theaters unfolds, these factors will appear in various manifestations throughout the business practices. There will likely be variance between propositions and data, and it is likely that there will be differing degrees of implementation of these key factors between the two theaters themselves. For example, one company may have an emphasis on volunteer infrastructure while the other allows personnel organization to occur and grow more organically with the company. It will be interesting to note the variation and similarities found in the data, both as the theaters relate to the proposed factors and compared to each other. Given the growth of these two theaters, however, there is expected to be fairly strong correlation of the data to the propositions.

METHODOLOGY

For this original research, business plan documents were obtained from the subject theaters to be qualitatively analyzed. The term "business plan documents" is used because the resources provided by each theater are slightly differing from one another, depending on what documentation the company already had on hand. Once the documents were reviewed, a meeting was held between the researcher and the contact for each theater. In order to enable further review, these interviews were recorded and then notated at a later date. (IRB approval for these recordings was obtained prior to the interviews). Post-interview, the recordings were reviewed and analyzed, along with the previously mentioned resources provided by the theaters.

In order to select theaters for research, personal connections for interviews were preferred and explored, making introductions with contacts of both the second reader, Katie Goodwin, and the student researcher, Lilliana Napier.

In the analysis of the theaters, the resources provided were reviewed under the "lens" of the Barringer/Ireland Business Model. The two theaters were assessed individually in search of the factors stated in the hypothesis (or the presence of others in order to disprove the hypothesis) and will then be compared with one another. The organization of the analysis will begin with a brief introduction of each theater as well as a breakdown of the analysis model. From there, the analysis will take place by addressing the theaters as they relate to each section of the model. In the paper's closing, a comparison summary of the two theaters will be given and will lead into the evaluation of the hypothesis in relation to the data analyzed. The key factors found throughout the analysis will be identified and addressed, proposing either a confirmation or rejection of the propositions along with explanation. Limitations to research will be mentioned and lastly, some final concluding thoughts assessing the project as a whole and its single most overarching key factor discovered over the course of the research.

INTRODUCTION OF THEATERS

For this project, the two not-for-profit "subject" theaters to be compared are Ragged Edge Theater in Harrodsburg, KY and The Center for the Arts in Murfreesboro, TN. Ragged Edge Theater ("Ragged Edge") was founded by Harrodsburg native Mary Chelf Jones in 1983 and is located in the renovated space of what used to be

Harrodsburg's movie theater. Sitting in a town with a population of approximately 8,500, Ragged Edge has always drawn heavily from the community in terms of talents, funding, and support. Over the last thirty-eight years, the theater has certainly seen its share of successes and failures. When the founder, Mary Chelf Jones died, the theater went through a difficult spell, unsure of the best direction to take after the loss of its matriarchal figure who devoted so much time and energy into the theater's birth and growth. In 2016, current Managing Director Allan Barlow entered the scene, hoping to rescue the theater from its slump. Over the last five years, Ragged Edge has seen a 350% increase in the number of season ticket holders and approximately a 100% increase in revenue. In that same time, the theater's volunteer base has grown significantly, increasing from only 10 participants per show to its current position in which a show with a cast of 20 could turn away twice as many auditioning actors as it cast (Barlow).

Less than 250 miles away lies another small-town theater, one that has also seen great success under current leadership. Murfreesboro's Center for the Arts ("CFTA") sits on a historic property, which most recently housed the Linebaugh Library up until the theater's entrance in 1995 when the library relocated to its current location just of the town square. Like Ragged Edge, the community theater has seen varying degrees of success in its lifetime. When discussing the legacy of The Center for the Arts, current Executive Director Patience Long, who joined CFTA's staff in 2015, says that she believes it had a lot to do with the management of the theater. Long attributes the theater's current success in her time as Executive Director to the willing nature and the supportiveness of the Board of Directors. As a result, in Long's tenure as director, The Center for the Arts has seen a 39% increase in revenue, 73% increase in audition turnout,

and a 4000% increase in children's program participation (Center for the Arts Information Sheet).

THE ANALYSIS MODEL

In debating how to organize the analysis portion of this thesis, it was suggested that a business model template would be a good way to create a clear process for comparing the two theaters. The business model selected is the Barringer/Ireland Business Model, taken from their textbook *Entrepreneurship.* This model is divided into four large sections which coincide with the creators' organization of the overarching components of a business: Core Strategy, Resources, Financials, and Operations. Within each of these sections are the following subsections:

Core Strategy: Business Mission, Basis of Differentiation, Target Market, and Market Scope

Resources: Core Competency and Key Assets

Financials: Revenue Streams, Cost Structure, and Financing/Funding

Operations: Product/Service Production, Channels, and Key Partners

Each of these subsections allows for a deeper look at all the different potential aspects of a business that keep it running. As it is used in this context, the model creates a structure within this paper for the aspects of each theater to be organized, analyzed, and compared in a way that is clear and concise and allows space for conclusions to be draw within each subsection.

SECTION I: CORE STRATEGY

Business Mission

A business's mission statement should accurately describe why a business exists, what it aims to accomplish, and how it intends to create value for stakeholders (Barringer and Ireland 121). Written well, a mission statement paints a clear picture to all who read it of the business's goal or vision for its impact on the community. This is the "What?" and "Why?" of the four W's. It is this statement that will compel those who read it to become invested in the company in some way, be that through donation, participation, or attendance (in the case of a theater). Mission statements are considered most effective when they are concise, pointed, and easy to digest. With that understanding, here are the mission statements of the two theaters:

Ragged Edge - "The mission of Ragged Edge Community Theatre is to provide and promote the performing arts and to increase the cultural and educational opportunities available to the residents of Mercer County and Central Kentucky" (Ragged Edge Community Theater Information Sheet).

The Center for the Arts- "The mission of The Center for the Arts is to enhance the quality of life in our community by providing cultural and economic enrichment through the arts" (Center for the Arts Information Sheet).

Ragged Edge's statement is short and clear and gives readers a good, overarching understanding of the directive of the theater. While not overly detailed, it does speak to two specific areas of Ragged Edge's planned operations: providing arts enthusiasts with

access to the performing arts and granting the residents of Mercer County and Central

Kentucky greater access to the arts. It specifically states the theater's target market,

which is an added bonus. In both the Barringer/Ireland and the Collins/Porras

explanations, the authors acknowledged that the mark of a good business mission

statement is the ability to then align every proceeding action of the company *with* that

statement. While this does reflect largely on a theater's action plan more than the mission

statement itself, it is important to note that without a strong statement to target, an action

plan becomes like a plane with no destination. To that end, Ragged Edge has a strong

mission statement that can easily support an action plan's focus. It should be simple,

then, for administrators to be able to debate and make decisions while considering the

question: "Does this either provide/promote the performing arts in the area *or* increase

cultural/educational opportunities to our target market?"

There are, however, some limitations to Ragged Edge's statement. While it does

give specific areas of performance for the theater, there is little included that makes it

really stand out against other mission statements. It does not describe any sort of

differentiation between itself and other organizations in the area. Arguably, this is

excusable in this case because there is only one other arts organization anywhere near

Ragged Edge and it is in another county. Additionally, there is no mention of the culture

or specific values of Ragged Edge within the statement. Though some could potentially

extrapolate the values of the theater based on the statement and the fact that they are a

community theater, this is not a surefire approach to the mission statement. In speaking

with Director Barlow about the company's core values, he stated the following: "to

provide not only family-oriented live entertainment but to also provide performing arts

opportunities, both performing and educational for people whom [this is the only outlet that they would have]" (Barlow).

Speaking next of The Center for the Arts' mission statement, many of the same things could be said. It is shorter than that of Ragged Edge but still gives a well-stated vision for the theater. Similar in intent, CFTA's mission statement plainly tells viewers *what* they are about (enhancing the quality of life in the community) and how, generally, they aim to do it (by providing cultural/economic enrichment through the arts). This does, however, lack the other three crucial details that Barringer and Ireland believe are essential in the composition of any mission statement: differentiation from other theaters, a tone that represents the company's culture and values, and passion for the vision that sticks in the mind of the reader (Barringer and Ireland 122). Much like Ragged Edge, it seems that The Center for the Arts depends on its geographic and social standing to differentiate itself from potential competitors, rather than stating differentiation plainly in its mission statement. Also, like Ragged Edge, while the mission statement does generally give voice to the heart behind the theater, it does not display much passion for the mission itself, nor does it give readers indication as to the culture or values that the theater holds as an arts organization.

In the book *Built to Last*, the authors detail the importance of setting rock solid core values "that exist for a purpose beyond just making money" in creating a company that "stand the test of time by virtue of the ability to continually renew itself from within" (Collins and Porras "Introduction to the Paperback"). In an interview regarding Conscious Capitalism, John Mackey, the founder of Whole Foods Market, reinforces *Built to Last*'s stance by stating that "a business can't survive without profit, but that's

not why it exists" (Mackey 0:54). "The first principle of conscious capitalism is business must discover or create what its deeper purpose is" (Mackey 1:05). Core values, be they personal or organization-wide, drive every decision that a person makes. The corporate ones, when clearly articulated, can be the driving force that unites the efforts of those within a company to achieve greater ends. While both of these companies have core values that are worthy and noble, there is great merit to *publishing* those core values for the world to see. Not only is this a signal of deeper purpose and drive to potential patrons, participants, and partners, but it is also a mantra for those working within the company.

Target Market

The discussion of a target market within the performing arts is more complicated than, say, a grocery store or a movie theater, because a theater sells two kinds of services. A member of the general public is likely drawn to the theater because of the shows it produces or the art gallery it houses. However, someone within the arts community is most likely drawn to the theater by the opportunities it provides to participate in performances. As such, there are really two target markets to consider when it comes to a performing arts center: the patrons and the performers.

Understanding this, Ragged Edge Theater and The Center for the Arts have remarkably similar target markets in both respects. Since they are both community theaters, they both draw nearly all of their patrons from the surrounding area. In the case of Ragged Edge, they are the only theater in the county and, as such, have immense pull over the entire area. Given this information as well as discussion from Director Barlow's interview, Ragged Edge's patron target market would then be labeled as "theater and performing arts enthusiasts in Harrodsburg and Mercer County". Additionally, Ragged

Edge has a specific patron target market of school-aged children, which they draw in with their school matinee performances (Barlow). Being established in Murfreesboro, The Center for the Arts is located about 30 miles from Nashville, which is known for its performing arts scene (particularly music, but the theatrical arts are alive and well). So, this theater has a slightly different target market, drawing performing arts enthusiasts from the Murfreesboro and the greater Nashville area. With the additional space of an art gallery within the building, CFTA has an added target market of local visual artists and visual art enthusiasts in the Murfreesboro area.

Their target markets are also fairly similar, disregarding location. Both theaters offer both adult performing opportunities *and* children's shows. Therefore, both theaters are primarily pulling talent from their immediate area. Much like their patron pool, Ragged Edge markets to performers largely within Mercer county, although there is some overlap with the talent pool from neighboring town Danville, KY, which houses Ragged Edge's biggest competition, Norton Center for the Arts. Even then, the talent pool for that theater is primarily comprised of adults, so the children's target market remains largely untouched. Similar to its target market for patrons, The Center for the Arts targets both adult and child performers in Murfreesboro and the greater Nashville area. It is not uncommon for performers to overlap at several different theaters around town as everyone seeks any opportunity possible to exercise their craft.

Market Scope

In regards to the market scope for The Center for the Arts, it focuses on four main offerings to the public: adult-participant musicals and dramas, children's programs (with ending productions), independent children's productions, and event space rental/art

gallery. Each of these offerings caters specifically to a target market of the theater, although there is some overlap between the markets, since many adults come to see the children's productions and most of the adult productions are also kid and family friendly. Diversifying their scope with event space rental/art gallery allows the theater to reach yet another target market of potential customers who want for a space to rent or show.

Similarly to CFTA, Ragged Edge focuses on four main products within its scope: main stage (adult participant) productions, youth productions ("YouthStage" and Theater Camp), school matinees, and the New Works Festival. Like CFTA, Ragged Edge achieves its mission of providing family-oriented theater experience to the residents of Mercer County by targeting specific submarkets with these products. The main stage productions appeal to families as well as just adults, and the youth productions are marketed not just to children but to supporting adults in the town as well. The school matinees, in particular, are marketed specifically to classes of students in Mercer County and provide the greatest source of revenue for the theater. Lastly, the New Works Festival serves both the aforementioned target markets as well as budding playwrights in the area who wish to have their works produced and viewed by a full audience. In the case of both theaters, these target markets have expanded slightly since the beginning of each executive/managing directors' tenure. Director Long at CFTA focused heavily on growing the children's program at the beginning of her administration and Director Barlow at Ragged Edge focused heavily on selecting seasons of shows that were attractive to the standing and potential audiences.

SECTION II: RESOURCES

Core Competencies

In keeping with the Barringer/Ireland model as a template, core competencies must be next addressed. Core competencies (in addition to key assets in the next subsection) are specific elements of a business that are "both difficult to imitate and hard to find a substitute for" (Barringer and Ireland 124). They are capabilities of a business that aid in its basis of differentiation and give it a competitive advantage over similar business in the area of operation. In the world of theater, it is no secret that there are certain things that one might just consider "competencies" in the business: a certain degree of talent (assuming the goal is to attract patrons to the shows), space, either established or found, in which to rehearse and produce shows, and a way to publicize the works they produce to audiences. Beyond that, however, there are some *core* competencies that each of these theaters possesses that gives them an edge over the competition.

Listed below are CFTA's core competencies:

- a good team

- leadership with solid instincts about what will/will not create a successful work environment

- a strong understanding of the importance of relationships

- a supportive and rapidly growing community in Murfreesboro

- steady and involved communication with the community

- a track record that speaks for itself

Of these core competencies, there are a few that are worthy of discussion. Director Long insisted time and time again that one thing she contributes largely to the proven success of the theater is the healthy marriage between the Board of Directors and herself as the Executive Director. While not speaking of herself in an irrationally high manner, she took the opportunity to boast about the Board and the trust they placed in her. "I've inherited a great board… they just trusted me and took the risk," (Long). Additionally, she stressed the importance that they, as an administration, place on growing relationships with their business partners and the community at large. This is done, in part, by personal interaction between administration (mainly Long as the Executive Director) and the businesses that they partner with, and in part by surveys and questionnaires sent out to get the input of individuals in the community.

Below are Ragged Edge's core competencies:

- a strong, established presence in the community

- the advantage of a small-town with deep ties between individuals

- Barlow's ability to work a room and really shed positive light on the workings of the theater

- numbers that demonstrate success without the need for a sales pitch

Much like CFTA, Ragged Edge can safely boast about their established and advantageous presence within the community, due to the strong sense of history that ties the theater itself with the community. While this tradition has been carried on by Barlow in the last five years, the original creator of this bond was the founder of the theater, Mary Chelf Jones. Due to her status as a seasoned teacher in the community, "she could literally walk into any bank in town and say, 'I need you to write me a check for $5,000 because I'm going to start a community theater'" (Barlow). Even as Mary Chelf Jones transitioned out of her role at the theater and later passed away, the commitment to keeping strong ties with those in the community persisted within the theater (though some seasons of management were more committed to this than others). When Barlow join the theater in 2016, he saw the need for ties to be rebuilt, and went straight to work, using his gifts for "working the room" in order to regain the trust that had been lost by bad leadership. As the theater has grown in popularity and success, Barlow and his team have been able to utilize the growth-indicating numbers themselves as a pitch in order to incur further support and for deeper ties with the community. Though not as prevalently, Barlow also cited the Board of Directors as a strong backbone for the company. With each member representing a different aspect of the community, the Board now operates as a strong sounding board and source of advice for Barlow's managing decisions.

Key Assets

Key assets can manifest in a business setting as assets that are "physical, financial, intellectual, or human" and are used to enable the mission of the business (Barringer and Ireland 125). Examples of assets present within a business are cash and cash equivalents, inventory, PPE (property, plant, equipment), building space, equipment,

patents, and trademarks ("Types of Assets"). As in most businesses, theaters require a unique cocktail of these assets in order to achieve their daily and yearly goals as a theater. Based on the general assets described above, the assets specific to a theater would be such things as: a physical space for rehearsal and performance, auxiliary physical resources including set pieces, props, and costumes, financial endowment (usually in the form of grants, development money, and donations), intellectual assets in the form of acquired property such as scripts and music performance licenses to perform for the shows (except in the cases where new works are used), and human talent in order to enact the shows and run the theater itself (organization, marketing, problem-solving, etc.). These key assets are fairly similar between both Ragged Edge and The Center for the Arts. Both own the buildings that they occupy and hold extensive collections of set, prop, and costume pieces to supplement the production of each show. Both receive several grants and other funding from state and federal organizations and donations from sponsors and individual benefactors. Both theaters then use a large part of their financial assets (through the methods described above as well as ticket sales and camp tuitions) to fund the acquisition of intellectual property to perform and to support the artists that bring the shows to life on stage.

SECTION III: FINANCIALS

Revenue Streams

*Disclaimer: All of the revenue numbers discussed in the following sections are those from 2019, as the numbers from 2020 do not, due to the pandemic, accurately reflect the success and growth of the theater.

The financials section of analysis will first look at the revenue streams utilized by each theater in order to further their mission and achieve their long-term goals. As with the majority of theaters, The Center for the Arts relies on ticket sales as its primary revenue stream to support daily operations. According to Director Long, ticket sales brought in roughly $200,000 in their last year of full operation, showing significant growth from the $80,000 it yielded in her first year of service in 2015. Second to ticket sales sits their children's program, Center Stage Academy, which has also shown tremendous growth in the last five years and now brings in the tuition of roughly 160 youth participants each year, which totals approximately $100,000. Other revenue streams of the theater include costume, prop, venue rental, and official CFTA and Center Stage Academy merchandise, sold mostly to cast and crew members currently. By relying on ticket sales as their engine for daily operations, it allows the theater to better predict their budget each year based on past sales numbers. It is good, however, for The Center for the Arts to still maintain a healthy mix of both earned revenue and external funding in their budget in order to avoid the stress that often plagued The Arts Center of Cannon

County, which, during Donald Fann's time as Executive Director, operated at 85-90% income and required constant monitoring of the bottom line whenever a growth or operation decision was enacted (Fann).

Ragged Edge also uses revenue as its primary source of income, and ranks ticket revenue as primary, showing a 100% increase in revenue since Director Barlow's hiring. But unlike The Center for the Arts, which performs fourteen shows per year, with the majority of those being adult shows, Ragged Edge relies heavily on their school matinee performances as "the economic engine that drives the theater," (Barlow). Director Barlow claims that this is because of the excellent salesmen that children are. The emphasis on school matinees means that children most often come to see the running play with their class during school hours. Then, when they get home, they are so excited about the production that they continually beg their parents until the family goes back to see the play at an evening performance. Not only does this speak to both the enthusiasm of the young audience, but also to the caliber of performances that Ragged Edge produces and strong positioning within the community. They capitalize on the fact that "the first play that any of the kids in this county see is almost certainly going to be on [Ragged Edge's] stage… it's likely to be the only place" and make sure that it is production that properly introduces youth to the power of the arts (Barlow). In addition to ticket sales, Ragged Edge also employs tuition from its Youth Theater Camps and revenue from its costume shop, scene and prop shop, and facility rentals.

Cost Structure

In general, theater is a value-driven model, with companies working hard to produce the best show possible within a feasible budget. Center for the Arts and Ragged

Edge are no exceptions to this generalization. (*Though the following conclusions are not backed by hard numbers provided in this research, they are drawn based on the resources provided by the theaters themselves as well as the supplemental conversations with the theater directors.*)

The cost structure of Ragged Edge revolves around three main costs of the company: the facility, acquisition and production of the shows themselves, and marketing. The facility understandably takes large portion of operational cost due to property payments and upkeep of the building. With so many people in and out of the building regularly, attention to cleanliness and safety within is crucial. Additionally, the state of a theater makes a notable contribution a patron's overall experience when they come to see a show. If the show is stellar but the facility is bad, this will likely reflect on attendance numbers for future shows. As far as the shows themselves, Ragged Edge's current criteria for show selection is "name brand properties only" in order to ensure that the shows see a solid return on investment in the long run (Barlow). Particularly in a situation in which a theater does not have a solid reputation of good productions, it is prudent, though much more expensive, to select shows that the population knows and will have a greater interest in seeing. Musicals, specifically, are a huge draw, and "even though we *barely* broke even on a couple of the bigger shows, it brought more people into the theater than had been there in years" [emphasis his] (Barlow). Finally, Ragged Edge currently spends a sizable chunk of its budget on marketing, though, in conversation with Director Barlow, he claimed that most of the marketing budget is wasted, because so much of the theater's marketing is achieved by word of mouth and personal connection. If this is so, the theater could either consider reevaluating their

allocation of funds to marketing *or* the method of marketing used in order to better work with the established marketing patterns of the theater.

Like Ragged Edge, one of The Center for the Arts' biggest costs in a year is the upkeep of the facility. Especially since the Center is so busy, running fourteen shows each year, there is almost never a dull day in the theater. While this is great for business, it does require a large amount of upkeep in order to ensure that the theater stays stocked and in operational order at all times. Also like Ragged Edge, another key cost for CFTA is their show roster. When Director Long entered the Executive Directorship in 2015, the theater had a negative reputation and was suffering, both socially and financially. As a part of the effort to rebuild the theater in those two areas, Long decided to focus, like Ragged Edge, on shows that were popular, would draw crowds, and would give the theater a chance to prove that they were worthy of the trust and involvement of the community once again. The last big category of cost for The Center for the Arts is the payment of salaries and contract labor. While Ragged Edge operates using one salaried position (Managing Director) and then an extensive volunteer base, CFTA chooses to secure key personnel through some paid salaries (4), some hourly positions (3), and then contract labor, which includes directors, production technicians, and the set builder.

All this being said, there are certainly some cost-driven elements to a theater's actions. CFTA, for example, had to make some hard decisions at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in order to keep the theater from closing permanently. Director Long said that in order to take an extra step towards being able to keep the theater nominally operational, they had to "cut the fat and keep the bones" (Long). Similarly, Ragged Edge chooses a largely volunteer model of personnel organization in order to keep paid

positions low. And though this comes naturally in both theaters, using word-of-mouth advertising is another effective way to still be marketing well while also cutting costs.

Financing/Funding

Both theaters use a mixture of grants, development money, and donations to supply the additional financing needed to operate and grow within their mission and scope. CFTA specifically partners with the Tennessee Arts Commission (from $11k in 2015 to currently $30k per year) and the National Endowment for the Arts (currently $10k per year with application in for $100k this year) as its two main suppliers of grants each year. Ragged Edge receives regular grants and development money from the Kentucky Tourism, Arts, and Heritage Cabinet due to its growing popularity as part of the tourism industry in Harrodsburg alongside the largest Shaker community in the U.S., the flourishing bourbon industry, and several Civil and Revolutionary War sites. While funding from grants is a necessary part of a theater's livelihood, it is good for there to be both grant funding *and* revenue supplying the company, because grant money is never promised. In order to apply for a grant, the theater typically has to give an account of what the money will be used for, which typically makes these funds more appropriately used for special projects or the growth of a program rather than set, daily operations within the company.

SECTION IV: OPERATIONS

Service Production

In the case of a community theater, the service that it offers its customers is two-fold; it includes the stage productions that are marketed to the patrons and the acting and educational opportunities that are marketed to artists in the community. Like many other aspects of these theaters, their production operations are similar. The start of each season of productions begins, in part, with the selection of shows. In the case of Center for the Arts, that decision rests between the Executive Director (Patience Long) and the Artistic Director (Mark Williams). At Ragged Edge, the decision rests solely on the Managing Director (Allan Barlow). In both cases, the team runs the proposed selection of shows for the year by the Board of Directors, not for explicit approval, but to hear their concerns since they are seated as representatives of the community. The process for each individual production follows:

For the adult plays, each production begins with the assembly of the production team, including director, choreographer (if the production is a musical), stage managers, technicians, set builder, and costume team. During this time, conversations revolve around rough sketches of the set to be built, inspiration for costume design, and the scheduling of rehearsals for the show. Next comes auditions in which any interested actors are called upon to audition. Most shows in community theater are considered to be open casting, which means that actors audition for the *show* and are then cast as the director sees fit, rather than auditioning for a specific *role within the show* and then either being cast or rejected. This model creates a more inclusive environment that is customary in community theater. After the show is cast, rehearsals begin with a table reading of the

production. Typically, the decision regarding rehearsal scheduling is left up to the director (and sometimes the stage manager) and is dependent upon the availability of the actors and crew as well as priority of scenes to be rehearsed. The scheduling process is exponentially more complicated when the show is a musical, because music and dance rehearsals are required in addition to acting and blocking.

As opening night of the show approaches, costumes are fitted and tailored according to the actor's needs, the set and props are built and assembled, and the show gradually moves from rehearsals of individual scenes (and dance numbers) to full run-throughs (it is important to note that rehearsal space for each theater differs depending on the facility). The week before the show is set to open is referred to as "tech week", and this is when the show is adapted to the stage and completed with set, props, lights, sound, and costumes. This is when all of the last minute "kinks" are ironed out of the show. Programs are also usually printed during this time in order to prepare for opening night. The goal during this week is to polish the show in its entirety to get ready for audiences. Opening night differs at each theater, with most opening a show on Friday (although there is also typical variance to either Thursday or Friday night).

Children's shows have two main methods of production. They can be produced with an outline of casting, rehearsals, and tech week similar to the adult shows described above, or they can be produced in conjunction with a theater camp or after school program. In the latter case, students' time is occupied with *learning* the basics of theater and dance through the medium of the show on which they are working. For example, instructions in these programs will take the time to teach technique in dance and then have students apply those newly introduced techniques to the choreography of the show.

In this way, students are gleaning skills that will be useful to them throughout their

performing arts careers but still have a short-term product through which to show off

those skills. From a business perspective, this also create the opportunity for a double

revenue stream: the tuition from the children's program *and* the ticket sales from the

show performances.

Channels

Both of these companies use in-person and website channels to communicate with

their target markets. With ticket sales as the primary revenue stream, Ragged Edge and

CFTA have made it possible for patrons to purchase tickets to a show either online

leading up to the show or in-person on the night of a performance. Theaters generally

prefer that tickets be sold online prior to a performance because it creates a greater

assurance of revenue (it is often hard to sell tickets the night of a show), and easier than

handling money at the door moments before the curtain rises. As incentive, theaters often

set prices slightly lower for those who order online prior to the show date and will set

prices slightly higher for those ticket bought at the door. Their children's programs are all

handled online, with easy access links provided on the theater's home website.

Key Partners

The terminology of "partner" differs slightly between the Barringer/Ireland text

and what is referenced by the theaters themselves. In the Barringer/Ireland model, a

partnership refers to suppliers of a company as well as partnerships in which some form

of heavy collaboration takes place (i.e., a joint venture, a consortium, or a trade

association) (Barringer and Ireland 131). As the word was most commonly used in

interviews with the theater administrators, "partner" refers not to suppliers but to those businesses which sponsor or donate money on the theater as well as season subscribers and volunteers. Using the Barringer/Ireland model, suppliers for the two theaters would include the hardware and fabric stores from which they acquire materials for sets, props, and costumes. Often in the world of community theater, there is a sharing of resources between theaters. Based on their rental programs, both The Center for the Arts and Ragged Edge Theater have established themselves largely as a supplier for other theater groups, but it is possible that they also have occasion to borrow/rent supplies for a show from another theater.

As far as sponsors and donation partners, this definition widens significantly. In conversation, both administrators referred to corporate sponsors as key "partners" as well as the season's ticket subscribers. Given that these arts centers are embedded within a particular community, playing to that feeling of connected involvement is crucial in order for theaters like CFTA and Ragged Edge to survive and grow. In order to draw in subscribers and sponsors, Director Long (Center for the Arts) stresses that she places a high importance on personal interaction as well as letting the success of the theater speak for itself. When Long approaches a potential donor or sponsor, she goes to great lengths to appeal to them *personally* in addition to the company as a whole. She expresses the mission of the theater and uses proven growth to help the donor understand why supporting the theater might be beneficial to them. One of her popular selling points for the theater is its 400% increase in the children's program over the last five years. Out of the partnership, they will gain name recognition and merit points for supporting such a worthwhile organization. Speaking in truth about a meeting with a sponsor, she said,

"there's not another organization like us in Murfreesboro and you need it the more you're growing. People want to go see a live theater show" (Long). Director Barlow at Ragged Edge echoed Long's sentiment in regards to the growing tourist scene in Harrodsburg and the theater's integral place in it. This not only puts a positive spin on the meeting by emphasizing the area's growth, but also capitalizes on the theater's ability to further continue that growth. Above all, regardless of what growth is or is not in the area, seeking genuine connection with those in the community is crucial to success. "People will do just about anything for the arts", the key is "making people feel like they're on the team" (Barlow).

CONCLUSION

Summary of Research

This analysis has explored two community theaters, The Center for the Arts and Ragged Edge Community Theater, in search of the elements present within those businesses and their practices that have helped them succeed in the marketplace. Though there are certainly arts-based elements of a theater that are integral to its success, those discussed here speak more directly to business systems that have been put in place in order to create intentional space for the artistic elements to shine. Using the Barringer/Ireland business model as a template, this analysis has walked through the core strategies, established resources, financial structures, and operations for each business. Within these sections, it was discovered that there are many similarities between the two

theaters, which provides a strong basis for the correlation of success when viewed side-by-side.

Proposition one stated that successful theaters would have established steadfast core values and worked to maintain alignment with those values. This proposition was supported by this study's findings in both parts. Each theater's core values are contained within its mission statement, giving all who come in contact with the theater an immediate understanding of its purpose and drive. Throughout the rest of the study, readers see an undeniable alignment with those core values evident through each theater's business practices including its programs offered, procured funding, and cost structure.

Proposition two stated that successful theaters would work to cultivate a strong, clearly defined staff and volunteer organization. This proposition was not strongly supported by the found data in this study. While the necessity of volunteers can easily be inferred based on the focus on community involvement and engagement (see target market, market scope, key partners, core competencies, etc.), in neither theater does there appear to be a large emphasis on the volunteer structure or hierarchy. The theaters' core competencies, telling indicators of the way a business prioritizes certain aspects of its operations, mention nothing about the necessity for a strong, clearly defined volunteer base within the organization. There is, however, specific mention by each theater of a strong working partnership between the Board of Directors and the Managing/Executive Director, indicating this as a crucial element of success.

Proposition three stated that successful theaters would have acted with the understanding that connections and partnerships are crucial. This proposition was the most highly supported of the five. Largely due to the fact that the theaters being studied

in this project were community organizations, it was apparent throughout the study that both theaters fully understand and capitalize on the fact that such organizations cannot exist without partnerships with those in the community. This concept was supported within both companies' target markets, core competencies, revenue streams, services offered and key partners each in turn.

Proposition four stated that successful theaters would strive to join the conversations within the community rather than presume that their work would start those conversations. Much like proposition two, this proposition was not strongly support by data found in this study. Although there was ample mention of partnership and connection with members of the community, that connection seemed only to go as deep as recognizing the desire of the community for specific types of shows and programs. It is possible the lack of support for this proposition has to do with a discrepancy in the definition of the term "conversation" as well as a differing purpose for these theaters as compared to some others in existence. As Jon Royal and Vanessa Weig used the word in the background research, "conversation" alluded heavily to topics of social justice. While these two communities likely are staying up-to-date with conversations within the nation related to social justice, neither of these theaters' primary aim is to provide content that delves into such topics. As expressed in the mission statements, the goal of these companies is to provide quality theater exposure and education for those in the area. Though theater is a fantastic tool for exploring difficult social conversations, it is not the aim of these particular organizations.

Proposition five stated that successful theaters would prioritize active programming that caters to the needs of their communities. This proposition was strongly

supported by the data. Much like proposition three, it is clear throughout the study that both The Center for the Arts and Ragged Edge Theater have an undeniable drive to seek and satisfy the needs and wants of the patrons and performers within their community. By engaging in personal contact and more far-reaching methods of communication, both theaters do their best to design programs that cater to those needs in order to provide the enrichment opportunities promised in their mission statements.

What is seen, then throughout the research is a cyclical effect. The proposed factors feed into the implementation of the found factors, which then serve to further the implementation of the proposed ones. For example, there are several factors within the propositions (the clear statement of core values, action-based alignment with those core values, and prioritization of connection) that play a big role in Ragged Edge and CFTA's ability to establish strong volunteer and monetary partnerships within the community. It was easy to see in interviews with both Director Barlow and Director Long that a large reason for this is their unrelenting belief in the mission and values of the theater. Though neither business has core values expressly stated as apart from their mission statement, they certainly hold to them internally within the organization. It is this strong hold on those unwritten core values that permeates their conversations with partners in the community, which, in turn, leads to greater gains in terms of sponsorships, donations, season subscriptions, and so forth (a direct addition to funding). When one speaks to Patience Long or Allan Barlow about their organization, one cannot help but to feel the passion these administrators have for enabling artists to create works and then using them to further enlighten the surrounding community. In much the same way, those core values

have carried over into the culture within the theater as each has grown under its respective administrator.

Within the same vein, the found factor of a "targeted engagement within the community" could potentially be seen as a result of a well-defined volunteer organization, though this was not explicitly prioritized by either theater. Targeted engagement is an action that is much more easily achieved when a theater has an active and willing roster of volunteers who are each involved in their little circles of community. They are able to raise awareness for the theater, pull in other potential artists as participants, and better advertise the carefully selected shows that the theater produces for its audience. However, in order to do this, the theater must first engage people to become volunteers. Additionally, one could claim that the children's theater programs at both CFTA and Ragged Edge are a direct result of each theater listening to the needs and desires of its community and responding in kind. Rather than merely performing off-Broadway shows only for adults, these are theaters that carefully considered the community in which they exist and created programs that would target specific markets within it.

Limitations of the Research

There were limitations to this research project. Barring personal barriers and setbacks along the way, the onset of COVID-19, unsurprisingly, created a large hurdle to navigate. With the arrival of the virus came the shutdown of all non-essential activities, including live theater. While the original plan for this thesis had been to write a business plan for a community theater start-up with the help of in-person interviews from theater administrators in the area, this was thwarted by the virus. This required a revision of the

thesis plan, and with it, a time set back. Additionally, the data used was skewed in its results because both theaters chosen for the analysis are considered successful. Therefore, there was no baseline or comparison company to represent an *unsuccessful* company. As such, the comparison between Ragged Edge Theater and The Center for the Arts proved to be more of a discussion of similarities and collective body of evidence in support or rejection of the propositional statements. While this was beneficial, because it gave the analysis stronger confirmation/rejection of the proposed key factors than just one theater's analysis would have, it also gave no counterargument or example of an unsuccessful theater.

Final Conclusion

What did this study reveal? Over the course of this research and analysis, it has become apparent that there are some overarching key factors that contribute majorly to the success of non-profit community theaters as reflected in their increased ticket sales and the overall longevity of the theater. The greatest of these factors is reflected in the title "*community* theater". In every piece of research and data collected for this project, human engagement was key. In *Built to Last*, human engagement looked like the communication of core values to all members of a given team. In *The E-myth Revisited*, it looked like reaching out to those around the start-up business to get a feel for what services and products people were interested in buying. In *Entrepreneurship*, the human component was always taken into account, continually pointing readers back to the business' ultimate service of the customer and how each subsection of its model helps achieve that goal. Undeniable themes of conversation and communication ran through the string of background research interviews. Similarly, in the data interviews, both theater

directors cited intentional personal connection with those in the community as an absolute necessity for their business. This point brings this project back to its start. There are many benefits to the marriage between business and art, most prominently the major commonality between them: human connection. Within the arts, human connection is reflected in the in-depth stories brought to life by artists for the benefit of not only themselves but their audience as well. In business, human connection is crucial in order to establish the partnerships necessary to succeed. It is connection that has brought humans to where they are today. In summation, if there were but *one* key factor that contributes to the success of these theaters, it would intentional connection. It is through this that partnerships are build, volunteers and participants are recruited, patrons are collected, and communities are strengthened. It is under the umbrella of a strong *community* that these theaters succeed.

APPENDIX A

Visionary vs. Comparison Companies studied in *Built to Last*

3M vs. Norton	Sony vs. Kenwood
American Express vs. Wells Fargo	Wal-Mart vs. Ames
Boeing vs. McDonnell Douglas	Walt Disney vs. Columbia
Citicorp vs. Chase	
Ford vs. GM	
GE vs. Westinghouse	
Hewlett-Packard vs. Texas Instruments	
IBM vs. Burroughs	
Johnson & Johnson vs. Bristol-Meyers	
Marriott vs. Howard Johnson	
Merck vs. Pfizer	
Motorola vs. Zenith	
Nordstrom vs. Melville	
Procter & Gamble vs. Colgate	
Philip Morris vs. R.J. Reynolds	

APPENDIX B

The Barringer/Ireland Business Model Template

Core Strategy	
Business Mission	**Basis of Differentiation**
Target Market	**Product/Market Scope**

Resources	
Core Competency	**Key Assets**

Financials	
Revenue Streams	
Cost Structure	**Financing/Funding**

Operations	
Product (or service) Production	**Channels**
	Key Partners

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IRB

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Office of Research Compliance,
010A Sam Ingram Building,
2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd
Murfreesboro, TN 37129

IRBN001 - EXPEDITED PROTOCOL APPROVAL NOTICE

Saturday, July 18, 2020

Principal Investigator	**Lilliana Napier** (Student)
Faculty Advisor	John Mullane
Co-Investigators	NONE
Investigator Email(s)	*len2s@mtmail.mtsu.edu; jmullane@mtsu.edu*
Department	Management

Protocol Title	***A working business plan for a not-for-profit theater program***
Protocol ID	**20-2199**

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the **EXPEDITED** mechanism under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110 within the category *(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior*. A summary of the IRB action and other particulars in regard to this protocol application is tabulated below:

IRB Action	**APPROVED for ONE YEAR**			
Date of Expiration	<mark>7/31/2021</mark>		Date of Approval	7/18/20
Sample Size	50 (FIFTY)			

Participant Pool	Target Population:
	    Primary Classification: **Healthy Adults (18 years or older)**
	    Specific Classification: **Current/former administrators at a community theater**			

Exceptions	1. Mixed method data collection - Interviews conducted by: (1) virtual methods (like Zoom) and (2) telephone. 2. Abbreviated informed consent administered virtually after the participants have received the approved full-length informed consent template. 3. Voice recording is permitted.			

Restrictions	1. **Mandatory ACTIVE Informed Consent.** 2. **Identifiable data/artifacts, such as, audio/video data, photographs, handwriting samples, personal address, driving records, social security number, and etc., MUST be used for the proposed research purpose only. The data or artifacts colected or information obtained must be destroyed once the data analysis has been completed.** 3. **Mandatory Final report (refer last page).**
Approved Templates	MTSU Templates: Modified Signature Informed consent Non-MTSU Templates: Abbreviated verbal consent script & recruitment email
Comments	COVID-19: Refer to the Post-Approval Action section for important instruction

Post-approval Actions

The investigator(s) indicated in this notification should read and abide by all of the post-approval conditions related to this approval (*refer Quick Links below*). Any unanticipated harms to participants, adverse events or compliance breach must be reported to the Office of Compliance by calling 615-494-8918 within 48 hours of the incident. All amendments to this protocol, including adding/removing researchers, must be approved by the IRB before they can be implemented.

Although this protocol can be continued for up to THREE years, The PI has opted to end the study by **The PI must close-out this protocol by submitting a final report** 6/30/2021 6/30/2021 **Failure to close-out may result in penalties including cancellation a collected using this protocol.**

Continuing Review   (**The PI has requested early termination**)

Post-approval Protocol Amendments:
Only two procedural amendment requests will be entertained per year. *In addition, the researchers can request amendments during continuing review. This amendment restriction does not apply to minor changes such as language usage and addition/removal of research personnel.*

Date	Amendment(s)	IRB Comments
NONE	NONE.	NONE

Other Post-approval Actions:
Date	IRB Action(s)	IRB Comments

07/18/2020	Due to the COVID-19 National Emergency, the Office of Compliance grants administrative authority to the Facutly Advisor (FA) to make the necessary changes or revisions to this protocol in the best interest of the health and welfare of the participants and student workers. The FA must notify such revisions upon implementation to the IRB via simple email or using suitable amendment documents. The IRB will audit the revisions at a later date and suggest any remedial measures if necessary.	COVID-19

Mandatory Data Storage Requirement: All research-related records (signed consent forms, investigator training and etc.) must be retained by the PI or the faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) at the secure location mentioned in the protocol application. The data must be stored for at least three (3) years after the study is closed. Additional Tennessee State data retention requirement may apply (*refer "Quick Links" for MTSU policy 129 below*).   Subsequently, the data may be destroyed in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity of the research subjects.

The MTSU IRB reserves the right to modify/update the approval criteria or change/cancel the terms listed in this letter without prior notice. Be advised that IRB also reserves the right to inspect or audit your records if needed.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board
Middle Tennessee State University

Quick Links:
  • Post-approval Responsibilities: http://www.mtsu.edu/irb/FAQ/PostApprovalResponsibilities.php

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  • Expedited Procedures: https://mtsu.edu/irb/ExpeditedProcedures.php
  • MTSU Policy 129: Records retention & Disposal: https://www.mtsu.edu/policies/general/129.php
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