



**City of Kingston
Report to Council
Report Number 19-082**

To:	Mayor and Members of Council
From:	Peter Huigenbos, Acting Commissioner, Community Services
Resource Staff:	Colin Wiginton, Cultural Director, Cultural Services
Date of Meeting:	March 19, 2019
Subject:	Renewal of the Service Level Agreement between the City of Kingston and the Kingston Theatre Alliance to Support the 2019 Kick & Push Festival

Executive Summary:

The purpose of this report is to ask Council to renew the existing Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the City of Kingston and the Kingston Theatre Alliance (KTA) to support the delivery of The Kick & Push Festival in 2019. Since 2016, annual allocations of funding have been transferred to the KTA from the Cultural Services Department's operating budget to support the presentation of The Kick & Push Festival based out of the Grand Theatre. This relationship, and The Kick & Push Festival itself, has evolved in response to a recommendation in the Kingston Culture Plan regarding the development of a summer festival that is intended to enrich the cultural life of residents, enhance the visitor experience in Kingston and motivates people to come to Kingston.

The relationship between the City of Kingston and the KTA was formalized after the KTA officially incorporated as a new not-for-profit performing arts organization in Kingston with a mandate to support the theatre sector and to assume responsibility for presenting The Kick & Push Festival. The creation of The Kick & Push Festival started in 2014 and was the result of a staff-led effort to collaborate with local theatre artists to develop a summer programming model that would be viable, sustainable, innovative and attractive to audiences by offering something unique during the summer months.

As stated, the Kingston Culture Plan identified the City of Kingston as being well positioned to facilitate this kind of undertaking by working with community partners to offer a high quality product that would leverage the Grand Theatre as well as non-traditional venues across the City. Discussions with various community partners began in 2014, and seed funding was allocated as part of the Cultural Services Department's 2015 operating budget to support the inaugural presentation of The Kick & Push Festival that same year.

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The Kick & Push Festival has now been successfully presented for four years and has evolved and grown in terms of its programming, funding and administration. Since 2015, the Festival has featured 25 productions presented at the Grand Theatre and within the community. The KTA has focused on delivery programming that is known for innovation and excellence. Another ambition has been to provide professional development opportunities for theatre artists and to develop the next generation of theatre artists by offering an annual summer theatre camp for children based at the Grand Theatre. The administration of the summer theatre camps has been governed by a separate agreement between the City of Kingston and the KTA that is negotiated by staff, under delegated approval of signing authority, that also needs to be renewed at this time.

The Festival has also been the impetus for increased activity in and around the performing arts in Kingston that includes significant employment opportunities for area artists, arts administrators and students. In 2018, the Festival directly employed or contracted 22 people who supported the artistic program and provided administrative, marketing and production support. Over 130 people were also involved in the various shows that were presented, including the Storefront Fringe that helped ensure local artists and audiences were actively engaged as part of the Festival. The opportunities the Festival has generated has brought energy and attention to the local theatre scene during the summer months and it has also resulted in the increased involvement of artists, audiences and supporters as well as funders, who represent both the tourism sector and higher levels of government.

It is being recommended that Council approve continuing the relationship between the City of Kingston and the KTA for 2019 to help the organization grow in ways that benefit the continuing evolution of The Kick & Push Festival, as well as the sector overall. Kingston is already recognized as a vibrant theatre community and this investment has helped to develop that reputation through the presentation of innovative work that is attractive to artists, audiences, partners and funders.

Recommendation:

That the Mayor and Clerk be authorized to execute a Service Level Agreement between the City of Kingston and the Kingston Theatre Alliance for the 2019 Kick & Push Festival that identifies the services to be provided and the associated funding of \$65,000, in a form satisfactory to the Director of Legal Services; and

That Council delegate authority to the Cultural Director to enter into such other agreements with Kingston Theatre Alliance, as required in 2019, to provide nine-weeks of summer theatre camps at the Grand Theatre, in conjunction with The Kick & Push Festival, and any other programming as deemed appropriate by the Cultural Director and the Director of Recreation & Leisure Services, in a form satisfactory to the Director of Legal Services.

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Authorizing Signatures:

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY COMMISSIONER

**Peter Huigenbos, Acting Commissioner,
Community Services**

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

**Lanie Hurdle, Acting Chief Administrative
Officer**

Consultation with the following Members of the Corporate Management Team:

Gary Dyke, Commissioner, Corporate & Emergency Services

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Jim Keech, President & CEO, Utilities Kingston

Not required

Desirée Kennedy, Chief Financial Officer & City Treasurer

√

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Options/Discussion:

Since 2010, the Cultural Services Department has been working to implement the 60 recommendations included as part of the Kingston Culture Plan. One of those recommendations identified that the Cultural Services Department should direct resources “to develop a coordinated and complimentary presenting program and some concept options for a summer festival in Kingston” (Kingston Culture Plan, Recommendation Number 6). Further, the Kingston Culture Plan states that the Cultural Services Department is “best positioned to facilitate community discussion on the subject, analyze the community’s distinct competencies and develop a thematic focus and practical implementation plan for a Summer Arts Festival”. It also indicates that a successful festival should celebrate Kingston’s unique history in an innovative way and support a vision of cultural development focused on providing high-quality products that enriches the cultural life of residents, enhances the visitor experience and motivates people to come to Kingston.

In 2015, staff responded to that recommendation by engaging in discussions with local theatre artists and community partners to explore what might be possible. The result was the creation of The Kick & Push Festival that involved various local theatre companies like Single Thread Theatre Company, Theatre Kingston and Blue Canoe Productions, along with such tourism partners as Downtown Kingston! BIA, The Great Waterway, Kingston Accommodation Partners and Tourism Kingston. The City of Kingston supported this initiative by providing creative input, administrative support and seed funding in 2015 and then by providing further investment in 2016, 2017 and 2018 through SLAs with the KTA, which incorporated as a not-for-profit performing arts organization in 2016 ([Report Number 16-172](#)).

At the outset, the goals of the Festival were to activate the Grand Theatre during the summer months, to engage local artists and arts organizations to present their work and to celebrate community and instill a sense of civic pride, while at the same time creating opportunities for creativity and engagement, as well as both professional and economic development. Stated in more detail, those goals included the following:

1. To animate the Grand Theatre during the summer months and extend programming out into the community;
2. To provide local artists and arts organizations, amateur and professional, with opportunities to present their work, develop new work and nurture their skills;
3. To engage the community through programming that fosters learning, challenges expectations and that is ultimately entertaining;
4. To build partnerships across the community and across sectors that result in programming that is truly collaborative and sustainable;
5. To provide local businesses and tourism operators with additional assets to attract visitors; and
6. To celebrate Kingston as a place that values culture, fosters creativity and offers a wide range of offerings that are accessible and interesting to a cross-section of people.

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The core aspiration identified at the time was to position Kingston as a mid-sized Canadian city that values culture and has ambitions as to how cultural vitality can be fostered and shared.

It was also intended that the Festival would provide a way to leverage the creative talent that exists locally and to work in partnership with a range of stakeholders across sectors to present a sense of confidence, creativity and excitement that has the potential to re-brand a community that tends to be more widely recognized for its history and sense of tradition.

The Evolution of The Kick & Push Festival

The Kick & Push Festival has now been successfully presented for four years and has featured 25 productions hosted at the Grand Theatre as well as in various locations in and around the downtown core. The Festival has also made professional development a priority and has offered workshops, master classes, panel discussions and critical writing to benefit a combination of both emerging and established theatre artists. From the beginning, those educational ambitions have also included children and young people who have participated in the annual summer theatre camp connected to the Festival that is based at the Grand Theatre.

In its inaugural year, the Festival featured six productions that included 45 different performances. The Festival broke even financially but, more significantly, it engaged close to 170 participants during its run including both paid and volunteer actors, writers, directors, designers, musicians, technicians, panelists, camp staff and workshop facilitators. It also involved the help of an additional 70 plus volunteers who worked to make sure everything ran smoothly. Six local theatre groups also participated as did seven organizational partners, including the City of Kingston, who supported the Festival through a combination of human, financial and in-kind resources. Audience numbers totaled close to 2,700 people with the majority of audience members being local but with some coming from other parts of Ontario and even a handful from outside the Province.

In 2016, the KTA officially incorporated and assumed responsibility for organizing the Festival with the support of the founding partners. The offerings also expanded in 2016 to include a new element, the Storefront Festival, which took over a series of vacant retail spaces in Kingston's downtown core to increase the number of performances available and to expand the reach and impact in terms of offerings and potential audiences. As a result, the Festival benefited from a significant increase in the number of productions presented as well as the size of the audience that attended (approximately 3,600 people). The percentage of available tickets to be sold also increased, as did the overall profile of the Festival that reached further beyond the Grand Theatre itself, animating more of the downtown core.

An unexpected outcome of the Festival has been the ways in which it has helped to seed increased activity among the partner organizations. That had not been expected but resulted in Blue Canoe Productions establishing the Juvenis Festival in 2016 as well as Theatre Kingston establishing the Storefront Fringe in 2017. Inspired in part by its involvement in the Kick & Push Festival, Blue Canoe Productions established the [Juvenis Festival](#) as a youth-led arts festival for young people aged 13-30. Its focus is on arts education, professional development and youth-curated and created arts presentations. It has grown tremendously in terms of scope and

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support and will be presented for the third time in 2018. Likewise, Theatre Kingston leveraged its involvement in The Kick & Push Festival to secure the support of the Canadian Association of Fringe Festivals to establish Kingston's own [Storefront Fringe](#) in 2017.

These ancillary activities have proved beneficial in terms of increasing opportunities for both young and emerging artists in Kingston but it also presented challenges for The Kick & Push Festival with some of its founding partners having focused their energy, effort and resources elsewhere. That forced a need to examine and re-focus the Festival's program that resulted in a shift toward a more professionalized model of practice in 2017. The Festival remained focused on presenting innovative theatre at the Grand Theatre and within the community, but it also began to engage mainly professional artists for the first time who had connections to Kingston or whose work was receiving critical acclaim elsewhere.

The result was that in 2017, the Festival program included a unique selection of new and award-winning work created and presented by a diversity of Canadian artists with experience working with leading companies such as the Shaw and Stratford Festivals as well as the Soulpepper Theatre Company and the indie theatre scene in cities like Toronto. In 2017, the Festival program once again included six productions but also made space for the development of new work. The Festival also partnered with the Dan School of Drama and Music at Queen's University and Volcano Theatre in Toronto to extend its reach and impact in relation to professional development for artists through a program known as [inFORMING Content](#).

The more professionalized model of practice implemented in 2017 improved the overall quality and caliber of the Festival but also impacted sales and attendance because the presentations tended to be smaller in scale and the content was more challenging on the whole. By contrast, the benefits included being able to pay artists and the ability to raise the profile of the Festival among artists and audiences outside of Kingston that is expected to pay off in the long run as a direct result of increased critical attention.

In 2018, the Festival once again advanced to another level in terms of programming, administration and funding. The Festival included seven core shows as well as the Storefront Fringe that included almost 20 additional shows. The Festival directly employed or contracted 22 people who supported the artistic program and provided administrative, marketing and production support. Over 130 people were also involved in the various shows that were presented, including the Storefront Fringe that helped ensure local artists and audiences were actively engaged as part of the Festival. The summer theatre camps also provide employment for three more people and engaged approximately 100 young people as participants over the course of the summer.

The KTA was also able to leverage the City of Kingston's support to secure an additional \$143,320 in revenue from local, provincial and federal sources, as well as through local sponsorships. Ticket revenue remains modest as the Festival strives to build its profile and reputation, but the additional investment and support the KTA was able to secure is a testament to the Festival's success in terms of bringing new and innovative forms of professional theatre from across Canada that garner critical attention and builds an audience of peers, locals and

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visitors to Kingston. Kingston Accommodation Partners also provided marketing support through an in-kind sponsorship and that relationship helped to expand the reach of the Festival into markets outside of Kingston. As a result, the Festival was able to attract a growing percentage of its audience from outside of Kingston and a review of those attending also showed that the Festival appeals to a younger demographic of people under the age of 40.

The Festival also partnered with Theatre Kingston in 2018 to re-integrate the Storefront Fringe as part of the overall offering and, together, hosted a joint launch event at the Grand Theatre. That event attracted artists and audiences alike and helped set the tone for the Festival as something innovative, creative and engaging that attracts attention to Kingston as a vibrant theatre community.

The Kingston Theatre Alliance and The Kick & Push Festival

The growth and success of The Kick & Push Festival is now closely tied to establishing the KTA as an organization whose mandate is to support the profile and development of theatre in Kingston as a creative pursuit, as a profession, as an area of study and innovation and as a tourism draw. As originally conceived, the KTA was committed to working with local theatre companies, both amateur and professional, to foster a community of practice that would benefit all involved. That initial work was funded by a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation and included the presentation of *The Library Chronicles* in 2012 as a joint initiative of local theatre artists and theatre companies. It demonstrated the potential of what could be achieved and the creation of The Kick & Push Festival in 2015 and the subsequent incorporation of the KTA in 2016 helped to carry that original forward.

Today, the KTA and the Festival are closely intertwined and their success depends on the ability of the KTA to attract new supporters, develop a diverse Board, and work with an expanded pool of partners and funders to offer paid opportunities for professional theatre artists to work in Kingston. Community-building, professional development and marketing and promotion are central to the mandate of the KTA that, together with presenting the Festival, enable them to provide opportunities for artists and audiences that would not otherwise exist in Kingston. In 2018, the KTA launched a [performance research blog](#) that serves as an open space for critical thinking, debates and reviews for theatre in Kingston. Through this community engagement and platform, the KTA explored the future of theatre, adapting to and incorporating new technology to the artistic form, paying artists a minimum wage and bridging the gap between indie work and mainstream theatre.

Together, the KTA and the Festival provide a unique opportunity for sector development that is proving to be attractive and, as such, the KTA Board now consists of a broader range of theatre professionals and community members who are committed to the development of the local theatre scene. They also possess extensive experience in theatre making, organizational development and administration, as well as grant writing and revenue development. Among the KTA Board members are the Director of the Dan School of Drama and Music at Queen's University; the Artistic Director of the Thousand Islands Playhouse; the Artistic Director of the Cellar Door Project; and the Co-Creator & Artistic Director of Spiderwebshow, Canada's only national digital theatre company.

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As in previous years, the Festival has benefitted from the support of numerous tourism partners and stakeholders, including Downtown Kingston! BIA, The Great Waterway, Kingston Accommodation Partners and Tourism Kingston. The KTA continues to work to nurture those relationships to mutual benefit while also securing funding through higher levels of government through agencies and organizations such as the Ontario Arts Council and Canadian Heritage as well as Celebrate Ontario and the Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund.

The Kick & Push Festival in 2019

In 2019, The Kick & Push Festival is scheduled to run from late July to mid-August and to feature a diverse mix of productions to be presented at the Grand Theatre as well as in non-traditional spaces within the downtown core. The Storefront Fringe is also expected to be presented in tandem with the Festival and a joint launch event is also being planned using the Grand Theatre as a base. As in previous years, the Festival will also be involved in providing nine-weeks of summer theatre camp for young people at the Grand Theatre. This program is presented in partnership with the City's Recreation & Leisure Services Department and aligns with the KTA's desire to create theatre-related education and training opportunities for people of all ages in Kingston.

The release date of the full Festival schedule is expected in mid-May 2019 with tickets going on sale later that same month. For 2019, the KTA has already hired an artistic producer who is focused on developing the content and it is anticipated this year's Festival will include as many as eight shows being presented alongside 18 additional shows under the banner of the Storefront Fringe. Numerous grant applications have also been prepared and submitted, including grants that that would allow the KTA to hire as many as 10 summer students in 2019. Additional hiring is also pending to ensure the KTA can cover all facets of the Festival including administrative, marketing and production support.

Building the profile of the Festival continues to be a major focus for the KTA and involves contracting a marketing coordinator to develop and implement a marketing plan that attracts local audiences but that will also reach potential audiences across the region and in other markets such as Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto and beyond. Partnerships with local tourism stakeholders are key to expanding this reach and work is also being done to maintain and strengthen the existing relationships with the Kingston Accommodation Partners, Tourism Kingston and The Great Waterway (RTO9).

The KTA is also actively looking at ways to leverage the resources available to it to raise the profile of theatre in Kingston overall. This is especially true in relation to the summer months from late May through August when The Kick & Push Festival and the Storefront Fringe happen, but also in relation to newer offerings currently being developed, including [foldA](#) that happens in June, as well as a new music theatre festival being planned by the Dan School of Drama and Music at Queen's University to be presented each May. Over time, the hope is that the KTA will be able to build its capacity to promote theatre in Kingston year-round and to expand these efforts in ways to build awareness of the diversity of activity that happens, including community theatre, student productions, professional theatre and new work creation.

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In support of the KTA and The Kick & Push Festival in 2019, the Cultural Services Department has allocated \$65,000 as part of its 2019 Operating budget. This funding has already been approved by Council through the annual budgeting process and it is being recommended the City of Kingston renew the existing SLA between the City of Kingston and the KTA to deliver the fifth iteration of The Kick & Push Festival in 2019. The administration of the summer theatre camps has been governed by a separate agreement between the City of Kingston and the KTA that is negotiated by staff under delegated authority and requires Council approval to be renewed at this time.

Existing Policy/By-Law:

The need to allocate resources to develop a summer festival in Kingston was identified as a priority within the Kingston Culture Plan approved by Council in 2010.

Notice Provisions:

Not applicable

Accessibility Considerations:

Not applicable

Financial Considerations:

Funding to support the KTA and The Kick & Push Festival in 2019, in the amount of \$65,000, has been allocated and approved as part of the 2019 Operating budget for the Cultural Services Department.

The Recreation & Leisure Services Department has also allocated funds in their 2019 Operating budget associated with the summer theatre camp to be offered at the Grand Theatre in conjunction with The Kick & Push Festival. This relationship is governed by a separate agreement between the City of Kingston and the KTA that is negotiated by staff under delegated approval of signing authority. As part of this agreement, the Recreation & Leisure Services Department will be providing one Camp Supervisor to oversee and coordinate the program, facilitate registration, provide three days of City-led pre-camp training and provide access to their facilities for related recreational activities. The KTA will be providing two Camp Leaders, supports staff training and shares joint responsibility for program content, delivery and supervision. This agreement also outlines how the revenue from the summer theatre camp is to be shared between the KTA and the Recreation & Leisure Services Department.

Contacts:

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Other City of Kingston Staff Consulted:

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Alan McLeod, Acting Director, Legal Services & City Solicitor

Danika Lochhead, Manager, Arts and Sector Development, Cultural Services

Dianne Zemba, Manager, Grand Theatre, Cultural Services

Exhibits Attached:

Not applicable