

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Barbara Wichmann
415.351.2227
b.wichmann@artemia.com

Bay Area Theatres Embrace the New & Old—to Keep the Show Running
A Fiscal Survey of the San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Community since 2008

San Francisco, April 27, 2009—Theatre Communications Group (TCG) and Theatre Bay Area present, to date, the most comprehensive data detailing the fiscal health and response of the not-for-profit theatre community throughout the San Francisco Bay Area since the beginning of the economic downturn.

The report, *Taking Your Fiscal Pulse*, presents new data, collected between February and April 2009, that provides insight into the operation of not-for-profit theatre organizations across the Bay Area. Participating theatre companies self-reported their fiscal status, the projected impacts of the economic crisis on their budget and their recession-fighting plans of action. Respondents represent approximately 66% of all Bay Area-based TCG members and 25% of all not-for-profit theatre companies in the eleven counties that Theatre Bay Area serves. The report offers invaluable insights for the management teams of theatre companies as they maneuver through this difficult period. It also supplies timely information for the key theatre stakeholders—audiences, trustees, foundations and corporate executives, policy makers and the press.

“The news from the field shows that theatres, like all Americans, are tightening their belts, revisiting their expectations and deploying both creativity and initiative in their problem-solving,” said Teresa Eyring, Executive Director of TCG.

The Fiscal Reality

The report finds that companies large and small are projecting declines in ticket sales, reduced government funding and less corporate sponsorship. In the final four months of 2008, fundraising campaigns generated less income than projected for 61% of organizations. Respondents are most concerned about corporate and individual contributions. Approximately 60% of all respondents project that the income from these sources will fall lower than originally expected. The majority of theatre companies also expect foundation contributions to drop below anticipated amounts.

46% of theatres are reprojecting their expenses downward for this year, 45% are anticipating a deficit and 51% expect to have cash flow problems at some time before the end of the fiscal year. Despite these findings, the report also shows that 55% are expecting to break-even or have a surplus by year's end.

Brad Erickson, Executive Director of Theatre Bay Area, states, “We’ve heard a lot of stories recently about high-profile theatre companies on the edge. What’s interesting about this data is that it shows that, while we are all experiencing hardships because of the downturn, companies are retrenching in new and innovative ways and are continuing to produce and present work. While under strain, this industry is not collapsing. We’re resilient and this research offers reason to think that Bay Area companies are approaching the continued financial meltdown with a sense of realism and confidence.”

Responding with Time-honored Traditions & New Technology

Although Bay Area theatre organizations are dealing with unprecedented stress driven by the loss and reduction of financial support, the industry, as a whole, is soldiering on—exercising

creativity in light of adversity and embracing both new and traditional practices to return to their missions.

Theatres have taken a number of actions in response to the economic crisis. In efforts to generate revenue, companies are utilizing new ticket discounting programs, developing additional income-generating programming and coordinating alternative uses of their facilities. At the same time, they are implementing cost-cutting measures such as reducing or freezing salaries and limiting the number of productions and performances.

In addition, theatres are exploring new ways to reach their audience and connect with their donors, both through new technology and by revisiting traditional, personal donor relation practices. Over 65% of respondents plan to use low-cost new technologies, like social networking, more and almost half plan more communication with stakeholders and sharing services with other organizations. “We are encouraged to see that companies are taking this difficult time as an opportunity to expand their knowledge of the new media technologies like Facebook, Twitter and other applications of Web 2.0,” says Clayton Lord, marketing and advertising manager of Theatre Bay Area and a co-author of the report. “These new outreach methods are very inexpensive and, when used correctly, can generate a lot of goodwill and excitement in the theatre company’s existing audience base.”

Theatre Bay Area has provided new media workshops to Bay Area theatre groups for years and hopes that the theatre community recognizes the opportunity in the midst of this economic turmoil. These workshops are part of the National Arts Marketing Project, a program of Americans for the Arts sponsored nationally by American Express. In the Bay Area, these free workshops are further supported by a grant from the Wallace Foundation, in partnership with the San Francisco Foundation, Grants for the Arts/San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund, the East Bay Community Foundation, San Jose Office of Cultural Affairs and Theatre Bay Area. To date, Theatre Bay Area has hosted seven workshops focused on new media technologies across the Bay Area. These workshops, which generally have about 30 attendees, have focused on a range of issues—including new media marketing, mastering Web 2.0 and creating multi-media. Theatre Bay Area plans to continue to host such workshops in the future.

The *Taking Your Fiscal Pulse* report is a co-publication of TCG and Theatre Bay Area and was co-authored by Clayton Lord and Christopher Shuff. The report was made possible through a grant by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

Theatre Bay Area’s mission is to unite, strengthen, sustain and promote the theatre community of the Bay Area, working from the conviction that the performing arts are an essential public good, critical to a truly prosperous and democratic society, and invaluable as a source of personal enrichment and growth. Theatre Bay Area’s membership is derived from 11 Bay Area counties and consists of more than 420 theatre and dance companies, some 3,000 individuals, and more than 100 organizational members. More information about Theatre Bay Area is available at www.theatrebayarea.org.

Theatre Communications Group’s (TCG) mission is to strengthen, nurture and promote the professional, not-for-profit American theatre. TCG initiatives include a variety of artistic, management, international and advocacy programs. Its many publications offer a national resource for reference, opinion and debate on theatre and the performing arts today. TCG serves nearly 500 member theatres nationwide. More information about TCG is available at www.tcg.org.