

Saskatoon Summer Players

Strategic Plan: 2010-2015

Vision Statement: *A community-based, non-profit, volunteer organization, Saskatoon Summer Players will celebrate its distinguished past by striving in the future to continue to produce and perform musical theatre of professional quality.*

History: Saskatoon Summer Players (SSP) began as a group of dedicated amateurs working out of Knox United Church who mounted their first production, “Oklahoma”, in 1964. SSP has presented one “main-stage” musical in late June/early July every year since then, from time to time has produced a second smaller show, and recently has also produced a series of reviews, the “Broadway Bash”, each February. SSP has always drawn on the considerable talents of amateur on-stage performers and off-stage volunteers from the community. No one except union personnel (musicians, back-stage personnel) contracted for a show has been paid; traditionally honoraria have been provided only for the director and the rehearsal accompanist. All concerned have taken considerable pride in mounting shows of high quality and, often, of professional standard. The organization has been administered – and operated – by a volunteer Board of Directors (BOD). To the present day, SSP has never applied for or received public funding; its operation has been wholly funded by box-office receipts and private donations.

For more detail and a list of past productions see the SSP website (<http://www.saskatoonsummerplayers.ca/>).

Planning Process: Formal recent SSP planning activities started with a facilitated workshop in 2007. A proposal to restructure the BOD was developed in late 2009, and a Planning Committee of the BOD was established in the spring of 2010. Consultations with selected members of the performing arts community were undertaken in the summer of 2010 and were used in drafting the detailed *Environmental Scan* that can be found in *Appendix A*. A facilitated BOD “retreat” with guest specialists in attendance was held in early September 2010 to discuss a draft strategic plan. The present document is the cumulative result of these efforts.

The SSP niche: In a community of Saskatoon’s size, major musical theatre productions can only be mounted by an organization such as SSP that relies primarily on community volunteers for both on-stage and off-stage needs. There is a wide range of interests (both among the performers/directors and within the theatre-going public) in the kinds of productions that could be mounted by such an organization.

Goals: Goal #1: *To become better organized so that organizational effectiveness meets the standard required to achieve our vision and goals.*

Goal #2: *To continue to offer opportunities to both on-stage and off-stage volunteer personnel for development of their individual talents and interests and to provide a rewarding working environment that enables these volunteers to gain personal satisfaction from their efforts.*

Goal #3: *To become more outward looking, more forward thinking, and more “marketing-savvy” as an organization and to communicate better with our community.*

Strategic Action Plan:

I. Throughout SSP’s history the Board of Directors has been an “operational” Board having direct responsibility for everything from accounting to publicity. Members of the BOD have frequently served as key members of the production team or in the cast of the show. This model has proved difficult to sustain in recent years; effectiveness, time-commitment and continuity have been problematic. **Objective 1:** *To move towards a more governance-oriented and less “hands-on” (operational) Board of Director and to appoint a part-time “General Manager” as a first step in moving towards a “Managing Director – Artistic Director” model of operations.*

Action items (responsibility; time line):

(i) Develop a position description for a part-time General Manager to be filled as soon as practical (*Result:* Position description in place.)

(ii) Rework Board responsibilities to accommodate a General Manager position and to separate production and policy responsibilities – *i.e.* develop a hybrid governance model for 2010-15 (*Result:* in progress.)

(iii) Seek funding for SSP operations and initiatives from the Saskatchewan Arts Board, SaskCulture and the City of Saskatoon. (BOD; annually ongoing. *Result:* First CBG application submitted to SaskCulture.)

(iv) Develop plans and guidelines for the possible future introduction of the position of Artistic Director. (BOD; For implementation as appropriate near the end of the 2010-2015 planning period.)

(v) Review strategic plan and action items. (BOD; annually or as required)

II. Production can be better organized and budget control better maintained *via* the creation and experiential revision of a full production manual containing written guidelines, expectations, support mechanisms, check lists and contracts for all production personnel. **Objective 2:** *To improve oversight, budget control and internal communications, and to clarify expectations, support mechanisms and responsibilities by updating and expanding the production manual.*

Action items (responsibility; time line):

(i) Revise, update and expand the 2006 production manual to include a calendar, list of resources, and other items needed to meet objective 2. (Sheilagh Steer in consultation with members of past production teams; to start immediately, with a first iteration to be available by mid-Dec. 2010 and to be “workshopped” with the June 2011 main-stage production. *Result*: draft completed October 2010.)

(ii) Carry out subsequent revisions of the production manual. (producer and director of each show with BOD oversight; annually)

III. SSP has always asked its volunteers to do a lot and has been gratified by how many individuals have risen to the occasion, sometimes under difficult circumstances and working with limited resources. With increasing expectations of performers/production personnel on the one hand and of the theatre-going public on the other, SSP needs to do a better job of providing support for and recognition of its volunteers, particularly those working in off-stage capacities. **Objective 3:** *To provide appropriate support for and suitable recognition of key production personnel.*

Action items (responsibility; time line):

(i) Prepare an initial budget estimate for providing honoraria for key production personnel (BOD asap. *Result*: in progress) and after BOD approval adjust show budgets accordingly.

(ii) Develop mechanisms and written guidelines for providing non-monetary support for and public recognition of production personnel - *e.g.* apprenticeships, subsidization to attend workshops, activate use of professional development fund. (BOD; for implementation in 2011)

(iii) Undertake active recruitment of additional production personnel by mounting workshops and establishing positions such as assistant producer, assistant stage manager, etc. (production heads with BOD oversight; implementation in 2011)

IV. It is becoming increasingly clear that a wide variety of shows (small cast/large cast, general themes/more adult themes, appealing to young audience/appealing to mature audience, contemporary/traditional) appeal to SSP performers and production staff and can appeal to Saskatoon theatre-goers. While keeping its niche in mind, SSP should strive to present musical theatre shows appealing to a variety of tastes during the next 3-5 years. **Objective 4:** *To insure a rotation of shows appealing to a range of age groups and tastes.*

Action items (responsibility; time line):

(i) Expand and adapt the existing criteria for selection of the main-stage, fall and Broadway Bash shows (BOD committee; fall 2010, with annual revision. *Result*: in progress)

V. SSP works within a lively performing arts community, but except for Gateway Players (now defunct) - has not developed a strong working relationship with other performing arts organizations. There are significant mutual advantages that can accrue from establishing such relationships, especially in a community of Saskatoon's size. **Objective 5:** *To develop and maintain mutually beneficial working relationships with key performing arts organizations and stakeholders.*

Action items (responsibility; time line)

(i) Prepare a draft document for BOD discussion, approval and action, which will include: (a) Identification of potential partners and mutual benefits to be achieved. Leave open possibility of re-uniting SSP and Gateway Players successor. (b) Identification of potential sources of grant support and criteria for securing such grants. (c) Identification of provincial (*e.g.* SaskCulture, Theatre Saskatchewan) and other agencies that would offer mutual benefit through SSP membership. (BOD, November 2010, with annual review by BOD.)

(ii) Apply for memberships, approach potential partners and apply for available grants as appropriate. (BOD responsible for grant applications; implement in fall, 2010. *Result:* SaskCulture membership applied for; CBG application submitted to SaskCulture.)

VI. SSP can benefit greatly by more actively engaging its membership and vigorously pursuing Saskatoon's active and passive community of theatre-goers as SSP patrons. Previous "visioning" events have identified SSP as too "inward-looking", and communications have sometimes been ineffective. **Objective 6:** *To improve marketing and community engagement, to better communicate and to promote SSP's social activities.*

Action items (responsibility; time line)

(i) Identify the means (*e.g.* website, email, blogs, facebook, etc.) whereby the communications, community engagement and marketing aspects of objective 6 can be implemented (BOD, October 2010; *Result:* in progress)

(ii) Develop policies whereby those means identified in 6 (i) should operate and approve these policies. (members of BOD with assistance, approval by BOD; asap)

(iii) Activate the approved means of achieving objective 6. (General Manager and/or volunteer and/or professional specialists; asap)

(iv) Review effectiveness of incremental marketing, communications activities. (BOD; at least semi-annually)

(v) Identify a member of the BOD who will act as social coordinator. (TBA; following AGM, Nov. 2010)

APPENDICES:

A. ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

Environmental Scan - External:

Opportunities:

1. *Lively arts environment.* Saskatoon Summer Players operates within a lively music and theatre arts environment in Saskatoon and surrounding district. There is a supportive music theatre community and a ready-made theatre-going public.

2. *First class performance venue.* SSP now has access to a first class venue (the Remai Arts Centre) for its “main-stage” production; professional production quality is no longer constrained by performance facilities. This is attractive to both performers and the theatre-going public.

3. *Good storage and construction facilities.* The purchase of storage and set-construction facilities (in Dalmeny) by SSP has solved the organization’s own immediate space needs. This development provides the opportunity for SSP to offer a central support/shared resource facility for other Saskatoon area theatre organizations, while at the same time profiting financially from a sound real-estate transaction.

4. *Dedicated, talented community volunteers.* A community of dedicated volunteers who are interested in the performing arts in general – and in musical theatre in particular – reside in Saskatoon and environs. These volunteers include talented individuals who fill the many on-stage and off-stage roles required of a full-scale musical theatre production.

Challenges:

1. *Competition.* There is substantial, growing competition for support (financial, volunteer and box-office). The SSP main-stage show competes with the major production of the Saskatoon Opera Association (SOA) in June for space and volunteers and for the patronage of a segment of the theatre-going public. Smaller scale musical theatre productions are mounted routinely at various times during the year by local professional theatre companies/organizations.

2. *Expectation of professional quality productions.* The availability of a purpose-built venue for professional theatre has raised standards among all concerned, including the theatre-going public; professional quality productions are now expected routinely.

3. *Limited volunteer pool – danger of “burn-out”.* The volunteer talent pool is not infinite, and some of the same individuals are called upon to work not only with SSP, but also with other organizations such as the SOA. Volunteer overload and “burn-

out” is a danger and increasingly a reality. Providing key individuals involved in SSP productions with the working conditions and the personal rewards needed to secure their continued involvement has become an imperative.

4. *Changing tastes.* SSP has always been cognizant of the need to present “family” entertainment, and this has constrained the choices of main stage productions. Tastes evolve, however, and it may now be time to consider musicals based on more mature themes.

5. *Lack of space.* The performing arts generally in Saskatoon suffer from a lack of suitable storage, office, and especially rehearsal space.

Environmental Scan - Internal:

Strengths:

1. SSP has a long and generally positive history, and is generally well-respected for the place it holds in the Saskatoon arts community and for the quality of its shows. Past performers generally speak fondly of their SSP experiences.
2. SSP is presently financially stable and has the financial ability to mount large scale, productions that are popular with Saskatoon audiences.
3. SSP draws on and encourages many talented performers of all ages.
4. SSP provides good opportunities for individuals to develop their talents and interests both on-stage and off-stage. There are good opportunities for expansion of these and similar activities through SSP-sponsored workshops.
5. SSP has helped promote musical theatre through its scholarship program and has received favorable publicity as a result.

Weaknesses:

1. SSP is organizationally inconsistent, sometimes poor at communications and setting out expectations, and weak on following through with budgeting and planning guidelines. (Lack of) continuity is a problem.
2. The Board of Directors acts as both a policy-developing and an operating body. Members of the BOD are called upon to do too much.
3. Procedures for show selection are inconsistent and time-lines are too short.
4. Shows are not always of the same high, near-professional standard.
5. Volunteers are sometimes asked to do too much – burn-out and turn-off is a problem. Off-stage volunteers do not perceive the same level of satisfaction as on-stage performers.

6. SSP has neither made effective connections nor entered into working partnerships with other Saskatoon stakeholder groups in the performing arts community.
7. SSP has not yet made effective use of social networking media.
8. With the demise of Gateway Players and loss of the shared “Studio”, SSP now has no permanent home for rehearsal; suitable dance floors are not available.

Other supporting documents (listed below) are available to members on request.

1. Proposed new organizational structure of the Board of Directors for Saskatoon Summer Players. Scott Rosendahl. Last revised 05-01-2010.
2. Report of the SSP ad hoc Planning Committee. (Proposed planning process.) Ron Steer. 10-06-2010.
3. List of persons consulted prior to BOD “retreat” held on 05-09-2010.
4. Facilitator’s summary of BOD discussions at “retreat” held on 05-09-2010. Sheilagh Steer. 07-09-2010.