

Crescent Fund Proposal Narrative

Cultural tourism accounts for 7% of our city's economy and yields significant benefits for our bottom line. In New Orleans, the arts have proven to be an important economic driver. But beyond their economic importance, arts and culture are essential to creating a society that is balanced and whole. The arts change lives for the better. For the last 25 years, the Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival has understood both the economic and social importance of cultural programming for our city. Now we seek to expand our mission goal to serve the community through educational, theatrical, literary, and musical programs with a new initiative through the Crescent Fund.

While New Orleans' identity is inexorably linked with its culture, with its food, music, art, and writing, and while the cultural sector works as a major economic driver for the city, we have found that certain segments of the city's population are largely absent from major cultural events. Younger audiences, those who are economically disenfranchised, and audiences of color participate in some of the city's rich cultural heritage (such as second lines, and jazz music), but do not attend others. As part of our mission, we aim to make the literary arts accessible to all peoples, and to that end, we seek a means of introducing literary programming to those who have typically been absent from our audiences. For example, according to an economic impact survey performed by the University of New Orleans, nearly 60% of our audience base is over the age of 50. Using informal survey processes of those who do not attend the Festival, we've often found that younger people and minority audiences have heard of the Tennessee Williams Festival, but that they have no clear idea of the programming we provide. The perception of our event is that it is scholastic in nature, for teachers or older people, that it only involves Williams'-themed content. Most everyone asked has a glancing familiarity with the STELLA Shouting contest, our most popular event. STELLA draws a wide and diverse cross-section of people each year because it is clever, interactive, and egalitarian. Taking the success as a model, we seek to develop a late night track for our Festival in 2011 with the aim of making our event seem as fun and accessible as STELLA. Using the model of our already successful poetry slam (which was attended by nearly 200 people, most of them younger than 40), we will offer three nights of literary and cultural programming that utilizes a "night club" feel and offbeat programming choices to bring literature to expanded audiences. These will include a poetry slam, a night of readings with John Waters and Grace Zabriskie, and a literary erotica and burlesque performance. Our aim is that these events will appeal to younger audiences while still maintaining our high programming standards.

With the late night programming, we aim to serve a general population, but with a special focus on engaging younger audiences from myriad cultural and economic backgrounds. Although there are other poetry slams and literary events in the city, our events, as a component of the Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival, are unique inasmuch as they are part of a larger cultural organization. Just as Jazz Fest addresses different populations through its folk life village, its lecture series, and its contemporary arts pavilion to bring diverse audiences to what was originally conceived as a music event, we hope expanding programming in our late night will allow new audiences to

experience our cultural offerings. Furthermore, we hope to use the late night events as a gateway to our daytime programming, to show those who attend that literature is alive, breathing and changing, that it is a medium which everyone can participate in, and that it has the ability to stimulate, challenge, and educate. We plan to partner with organizations like the Ashe Cultural Center, the Anthony Bean Community Theater, and others. We will also continue partnerships from our educational outreach program as well. A number of tickets will be made available for those who could not otherwise afford to attend. Poets who compete in the slam are eligible to win a cash prize.

Our success will be measured by the quality of programming offered and by the new audiences it reaches. We solicit feedback from our audience members through surveys. Additionally, we ask presenters for their comments and utilize the services of an independent evaluator to ensure the quality of our programming. However, creating a quality program takes time. The Festival works with a limited staff to plan, fundraise for, and execute our events each year. Because of this, we plan far in advance in order to assure all details are in order. We have a proven track record of solid programming and professionalism. Each year, we plan and present over 100 different program activities during a 5-day period. A sample project timeline is as follows for the late night programs:

August/September – initial ideas for programming are discussed in programming committee chaired by Susan Larson, author and journalist.

October – Participants for late night events are asked via official contact.

November – Space for Late Night Events is reserved. We have previously used One-Eyed Jacks on Toulouse St. in the French Quarter and will likely ask to do so again.

December – Publicity for event begins. Event will be publicized on our website, through Facebook, newsletters, traditional media and as part of our Festival program

January /February/Early March – Organizers will schedule presenters, arrange travel and hotel, run dress rehearsal, further publicize events, and work with other area organizations to market and promote Late Night

March 24-26, 2011 – Late Night Programming

March 24, 2011 – Literary Late Night Poetry Slam and Comedy Performance

March 25, 2011- Weird, Wild and Wired: An Evening with John Waters and Grace Zabriskie

March 26, 2011 – Bedtime Stories – Readings and burlesque performance with Fleur de Tease