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Nat'l Theatre Conf.

# NATIONAL THEATRE CONFERENCE

FORTY EAST FORTY-NINTH STREET, NEW YORK CITY

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April 9, 1935

Mr. David H. Stevens  
General Education Board  
49 West 49th Street  
New York City

My dear Mr. Stevens:

Mrs. Isaacs and I want very much to consult you on the subject of a request for a subsidy for the National Theatre Conference from the General Education Board. Before making the request officially, we would like to ask your help and advice as to the best method of presenting the subject.

Could we make an appointment to see you at some time convenient to yourself? I will telephone your secretary in a day or two to find out if you are in town and when you can see us.

In the meantime, I am enclosing herewith the preliminary draft of the request as a point of departure. Perhaps you will have time to glance over it before we meet. I hope I am not asking too much of you, but you have been so kind and so interested in our problems that I am taking this liberty.

Sincerely,

*Rosamond Gilder*

Rosamond Gilder  
Editorial Secretary

RG:st  
Enclosure



Dear Mr. Stevens:

This letter comes to you as a request for support for the National Theatre Conference, which is, as you know, a project to serve collectively the interests of the American theatre, and which represents the only existing union of non-profit and educational theatres throughout the country.

The purpose of the National Theatre Conference is not only to raise the standards of production in the theatre and assist in developing the best methods of dramatic education in schools and colleges, but also to create a sense of what the theatre as an art, as a factor in education, as a force for social release, might mean to the entire country if its powers were developed to their full capacity and used co-operatively for their full service.

Three years ago the National Theatre Conference was formed under the sponsorship of the foremost men and women in the national field and under the direct leadership of George Pierce Baker, who was its first President. For ten years the need of such an alliance had been amply evident. It was clear not only that the professional theatre must, if it was to have any new life, be fed directly from the playwrights, designers, and other young artists growing up in the North and the West and the South, but also that community and university theatres must inevitably take the place, in all these regions, of the professional companies which in older days had made the theatre a part of the social and cultural life of the American people.

Although everyone agreed on the necessity for a national organization, the United States is big, its problems and opportunities are vast and varied, and it took two full years of meetings and active correspondence to work out a plan of national, interstate, intercommunity theatre service

that would be a good 'action platform' and both useful and acceptable to all the various regions--artistically, educationally and socially.

Two main ideas underlie the practical structure of the National Theatre Conference as it was finally evolved: co-operation, or the free union of independent groups for mutual service and assistance, and de-centralization, or the stimulation of regional initiative, opportunity and authority. Methods of work were formulated, based on the division of the country into sections with a Director at the head of each region. Services included: Regional and National Information Bureaus; a News Letter Service; the Publication of Books, brochures and articles of technical service to theatre workers which would be otherwise unavailable; visual education through the organization and routing of Exhibitions; and, especially, opportunities for the 'literal meeting of the minds' through Conferences, which is the most creative and energizing form of exchange. During its formative period the NTC had the active support of the American Association for Adult Education, without which it could not have come into being, or carried on during its first years.

The worth of such a national organization was amply proved last year. Though the NTC was not yet two years old and had less than ninety members, it was called upon to represent the entire body of non-professional theatres in the epic battle with the Legitimate Theatre Code Authority which took place in New York and Washington during the winter. Its success in the struggle to maintain the independence and freedom of action of these non-profit community and civic theatres focussed in a dramatic manner the vital necessity of a strong national organization.

During these same years the NTC has assisted actively in the development of the non-profit theatre as a means of social release. No form of leisure time activity presents wider or richer possibilities than the theatre. A synthesis of all the arts, it offers to every individual

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some form of active or passive participation. Audience, artist, technical worker, performer, teacher or student--the theatre provides opportunities for everyone. New theatre groups have sprung into being as a direct result of the pressure for some form of constructive community activity, while older groups have enlarged their field of service to meet the new demands. One after another these groups, new and old, have turned to the NTC for help in solving their problems, though many of them were so hampered by lack of funds that membership dues presented a serious, often an insuperable obstacle. The NTC, recognizing the need and the opportunity --and in spite of its own limited budget--gave such assistance as it could, and finally cut its dues in half, in order that the benefits of membership might reach those most in need of it.

The marked increase in membership during the current season (an increase of over 200%) proves beyond question the value of the National Theatre Conference and that its services are sound and effective. Yet in spite of its success it is today facing a crisis: it has to carry so many communal burdens that it cannot yet balance its own budget without a subsidy. With its fundamental program well in hand--a program which reaches deep into national problems of dramatic, educational, artistic and cultural development and social release, with its basic organization complete and its methods and services fully developed, it is headed for success and a large and useful life if it can be assisted financially a little longer. It has already to its credit a growing membership including theatres, libraries and educational institutions in forty-three states --the nucleus of a permanent and truly national organization which will in time be able to support itself; it has established the basis of a sound and permanent co-operation with such important national forces as the National Association of Teachers of Speech, the American Library Association, and universities and public libraries everywhere. The foundations of a useful and eventually remunerative publication program have



been laid down; and a number of far reaching projects, permanently serviceable to the entire country, are well in hand. It would seem particularly unfortunate, in view of the acute and increasing need of cultural and leisure time resources, to have the only national organization of non-profit, educational and social service theatres cease to function.

Among the specific projects already started and which would be carried forward with the general program of the NTC are the following:

- 1.) Assistance to Regional Directors in unorganized and backward sections in developing their community and rural activities. Valuable experiments in community work have been carried out in certain sections of the country; the results of these experiments should be made known to less favored workers in similar situations, not only by the circulation of written reports but, if possible, by personal contact and conference. The National Theatre Conference is the only existing clearing-house in this field; it should be able to serve effectively as the medium of exchange of such valuable and basic information.
- 2.) Making available to groups preparing to build auditoriums and theatres in community centers, schools and colleges, the latest and best methods of theatre construction; ordering, preparing and publishing a set of drawings and working plans for theatres of various types and varying costs, the plans to be ordered, at a stated fee, from distinguished architects familiar with the field and checked by competent theatre workers. These plans to be sold at minimum cost to any organization that wishes to build a new theatre or to remodel an old one.

- 3.) Enlarging and developing the library services of the country through the establishment of an experimental national loan library--a co-operative plan of the NTC and the ALA. Since books are an effective tool of the theatre, effective aid to small communities such a Theatre Library Loan Service.
- 4.) Stimulating regional playwriting and assisting the playwright working away from New York by developing the system of publicizing new worth while full-length plays through the Play Release Service already begun by the National Theatre Conference. The present system of mimeographed Play Releases distributed to member theatres could be effectively enlarged and increased in scope and importance were funds available for making a printed record of such plays and for the necessary publicizing of the idea.

The enclosed skeleton budget indicates the present financial set-up of the NTC and the funds needed to carry on without any expansion next year. This letter is necessarily the briefest possible statement of the situation which we will gladly enlarge at any point, adding detailed budgets for any specific project in which you may be interested. After many years of preliminary work and three years' intensive labor, we are convinced that a viable national structure has been set up. It would seem calamitous to have it crumble at this point. Knowing your interest in this particular field of activity, we are turning to you for advice and help.

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# NATIONAL THEATRE CONFERENCE

## TENTATIVE BUDGET FOR 1935 - 1936

### INCOME

100 Active Members	\$1,250.	
100 Associate Members	500.	
100 Library Members	<u>500.</u>	\$2,250.
Books and Exhibitions		<u>3,000.</u>
		5,250.
Subsidy needed to balance Budget		<u>7,250.</u>
TOTAL		\$12,500.

### EXPENDITURES

	Actual Cost <u>1934</u>	<u>Budget</u>
1) Administration & overhead	\$1,660.	\$1,700.
2) Editorial Secretary (budget)	1,700.	2,080.
3) Office Secretary @ \$25. Owing to the rapid increase of activities during the cur- rent season (1934-35) it was found absolutely necessary to add one secretary to the staff. She is busy every minute of every day.		1,300.
4) Office Personnel Services of Business Manager Accountant Telephone Operator Office Boy	1,900.	1,920.
5) Membership Services	1,202	1,500.
6) Publications, including Brochures for distribution, on Archi- tecture, Organization and Management, Community Thea- tres, etc.	2,545.	2,000.

	<u>Actual Cost</u> <u>1934</u>	<u>Budget</u>
7) Special Projects		
Survey of Libraries (1934), of Architectural field, of Personnel field, etc.	442.	500.
8) Conferences		
Assistance to Regional Directors in unorganized regions		
Regional Conferences	396.	1,500.
National Conferences		
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TOTAL	\$9,845.	*\$12,500

\*Increase is in items 3 and 8 *only*