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## **FERTILE GROUND FESTIVAL OF NEW WORKS RAISES FUNDS FOR FUTURE FESTIVAL DIRECTOR**

### **Crowd-sourced funding is first step toward sustainable leadership for next iteration of citywide new works generator**

**February 5, 2023 | Portland, OR** – The Fertile Ground Festival of New Works, a program of the Portland Area Theatre Alliance (PATA), is on a hiatus for the first year since its launch in 2009—an effort to plan a sustainable future for Fertile Ground. A key component of this strategic evaluation is funding the festival director position. PATA is currently raising funds toward compensation for this role with an online GoFundMe campaign: [Fertile Ground Festival ReGrowth Fundraiser](#).

These crowd-sourced funds not only seed the next leader of Fertile Ground—making it possible to offer the role with secured compensation—but will also reflect the value of the festival to local theatre-makers and audience members, making its importance evident to institutional funders, such as granting organizations and foundations, and large-gift individual donors.

PATA President Samson Syharath, alongside PATA’s Fertile Ground committee, has been working with former Festival Director Nicole Lane since last December to plan a fundraising campaign that will hit home with festival fans and past producers, who are right now feeling the loss of a festival— held in late January into early February—that has invigorated the theatre and performing arts community since 2009.

### **FERTILE GROUND REGROWTH FUNDRAISER DETAILS**

We’re asking anyone who’s enjoyed Fertile Ground to:

- **Give:** <https://www.gofundme.com/f/fertile-ground-festival-regrowth-fundraiser>
- **Share:** <https://gofund.me/5c198477>
- **Share your story:** Post a photo or testimonial. However you do it, sharing your own experience with Fertile Ground is a powerful way to spread the word.

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**IN THEIR WORDS:** Testimonials from the community about this fundraising campaign can be found on Fertile Ground's social media channels: [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#) | [GoFundMe](#)

**PHOTOS:** [Historical Fertile Ground photo archive](#)

## **NEXT STEPS IN FERTILE GROUND'S LEADERSHIP**

After 13 years of leadership that was offered on a largely volunteer basis, former Festival Director Nicole Lane is ready to pass the torch to the next generation of the festival's leadership. She will continue to be involved PATA's Fertile Ground committee.

"I am proud of my part in launching more than 1,300 'acts of creation' with Fertile Ground, and it has been an honor to support and teach thousands of artists, and producers over the years," said former Festival Director Nicole Lane. "And, now it is time for the next leader of the festival to emerge to guide Fertile Ground's future. In order for that to happen, PATA and Fertile Ground need in-hand compensation funds to offer for this role. When Sara Jean Accuardi came on board PATA's Fertile Ground committee to witness what we do, she noted that the mechanics of Fertile Ground are a bit like 'Oz behind the curtain,' meaning that it seems to be a much larger operation than it actually is. Run by a small and dedicated team, Fertile Ground has an enormous arts ecology footprint. Since 2014, Dré Slaman has been an outstanding managing partner who volunteered her work to making the festival happen. I have ever-flowing gratitude to the small band of Fertile Ground 'staff' over the years who volunteered their time and talents to Fertile Ground, and the artists we support. It is my hope that Portland's Fertile Ground-lovers will heed the call to action, value what Fertile Ground offers our community, and give in support of our festival's future."

The Fertile Ground Festival of New Works is an annual, citywide theater festival which yearly often featured nearly 100 acts of creation from dance and theater to educational events and play readings. Festival events take place in venues across the city, often making theater spaces out of unexpected corners of Portland and carrying festival passholders to undiscovered venues.

In recent years, innovations to the festival came about in response to the pandemic—all 2021 productions were curated, and were delivered completely online as a series of livestreams, or as static video content via Fertile Ground platforms. Also beginning with the 2021 festival, Fertile Ground prioritized—through curation, selection and cash awards—innovative projects that were centered on values of equity, diversity and inclusion. These awards were determined by the GROW Panel, a diverse selection of panel participants, who evaluated projects and provided feedback to producers. The 2022 festival was somewhat of a hybrid (see details below), but uncurated.

## **FERTILE GROUND HISTORY**

Fertile Ground was launched in 2009 to provide a platform for Portland theatre companies to showcase their commitment to new work. Today, the festival encourages all artists, of every background and discipline, to jump in to elevate a wide swath of voices and generate an exciting array of arts-centric offerings. Fertile Ground establishes for both artists and arts patrons that Portland is truly fertile ground for creativity, innovation and daring acts of performance.

**Fertile Ground 2021:** In 2021, in order to serve a wider range of artists and audiences in the community, and in response to the pandemic and racial reckoning, significant actions were taken to create an equity-infused process that prioritized inclusivity for the 12<sup>th</sup> annual new works festival. To accomplish these ambitious shifts, both the festival framework and decision-making structures were revised.

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Fertile Ground's virtual festival presented pre-recorded "acts of creation," submitted by producing organizations and artist-producers. Recorded premieres were live-dropped at scheduled intervals over the course of the 11-day festival, and streamed on Fertile Ground's Facebook and YouTube channels. Moving the festival to a virtual platform resulted in a limited number of available festival slots, therefore making Fertile Ground 2021 (FG21) a curated festival. While curating the festival was a departure from one of the key founding tenets of Fertile Ground, this shift offered an opportunity for the festival to evolve, to ensure representation of underserved communities, actively engage in pro-inclusivity and power-sharing practices, and present a Fertile Ground festival in 2021.

Intent on fostering a festival that was more inclusive of and conducive to the participation of underrepresented communities, Fertile Ground created a new community panel, the GROW Panel, created and led by Festival Director Nicole Lane. Demonstrating Fertile Ground's commitment to broadening representative inclusion of local artists, a panel—composed of individuals whose identities encompass a spectrum of underrepresented voices, along with Fertile Ground and PATA representatives— was instituted.

This decision-making body curated FG21 with attention to the inclusion of underrepresented communities,\* artistically interesting and culturally relevant "acts of creation," and projects with an innovative concept for a recorded piece intended for a digital media platform. Fertile Ground sought submissions from a wide range of artists on a variety of topics and welcomed an array of artistic genres and disciplines.

For FG21, Fertile Ground was awarded Regional Arts & Culture Council Arts Equity & Access funding. These funds were intended to formalize and expand the organization's initiatives to address equity and access barriers to participation in the festival that exist for underrepresented artists. The grant allowed Fertile Ground to distribute funds to artists/producers through the GROW AWARD program, which was supplemented by community donors. Five artist/producers received a \$500 GROW Award with the RACC funding, and four more were awarded funds from the community donors to the program. The GROW Panel in 2021 both curated the festival and adjudicated applications for the GROW AWARD.

"At this time, in our local and national landscape, our community needs artists' voices more than ever," said Dre Slaman, Fertile Ground Managing Director, about the 2021 festival plans. "This re-imagined virtual Fertile Ground is about innovation, inclusion, and, most of all, the resilience of our local artistic community."

"I believe we have a pivotal, vital opportunity to meaningfully invite new artistic voices into the festival while challenging all artists to innovate their work for this new kind of digital performance, and in doing that evolve Fertile Ground," said Nicole Lane, Fertile Ground Festival Director about the 2021 festival plans. "We are working on these changes intentionally and swiftly with more pieces falling into place daily. It has been inspiring to work with an incredible group of people to redesign Fertile Ground with our sights set on bringing a vibrant festival of new work to at-home audiences that features inventive 'acts of creation' from an array of local artists who are emphatically representational of our entire community."

**Fertile Ground 2022:** The 2022 Fertile Ground (FG22) was again a virtual festival due to the pandemic, but returned to its uncurated roots and offered the new works showcase to all Portland area artists. Given the unknowns of the pandemic and the burden of space rental, additionally, instead of presenting Fertile Ground projects via their online distribution platforms as accomplished for Fertile Ground 2021 (FG21), the festival directed audiences to producers' (virtual) productions.

The online and uncurated Fertile Ground 2022 were presented differently than in the 2021 where the festival released selected (curated) projects on a set schedule for public consumption on a donation-only basis via the festival's Facebook

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and YouTube channels. For FG22, Fertile Ground returned to functioning as the marketing platform for projects of new works. FG22 producers produced/premiered their work on their own platforms, at the times and dates of their choosing. Producers set their own pricing and box office, and determined how they plan to distribute their work to audiences for online consumption.

Fertile Ground organizers continued to be intent on fostering a festival that is more inclusive of and conducive to the participation of underrepresented communities and continuing work from 2021 efforts to address equity and access barriers to participation in the festival that exist for underrepresented artists. Fertile Ground's GROW Panel selected five GROW Award recipients to receive \$500 to be used in production of their Fertile Ground project. 2022 funding comes from prioritizing funds for this program in the Fertile Ground budget, and from The Think System Foundation.

For FG22 festival, the 2021-formed GROW Panel was a 15-person community panel led by Samson Syharath. The GROW Panel adjudicated the 2022 GROW Awards. New for the 2022 festival, the group also designated FG22 projects as "GROW Light" selections, works that met 2022 group's intention to highlight underrepresented communities, artistically interesting and culturally relevant "acts of creation," and projects with an innovative concept for a recorded piece intended for a digital media platform. The aim of this endeavor was to inform festival-goers of key projects that involve aligned artists and stories, and encourage typically underrepresented artists\* to be a part of Fertile Ground and elevate that work.

*\*BIPOC, LGBTQ2IA+, Disabled*

## **ABOUT FERTILE GROUND FESTIVAL OF NEW WORKS**

Founded by Trisha Mead with the first festival in 2009, and led by Nicole Lane from 2010-2023, the Fertile Ground Festival of New Works, a program of the Portland Area Theatre Alliance (PATA), is an 11-day arts festival that is held every January/February in Portland, Oregon. The Fertile Ground Festival of New Works, serves the Portland community's artists and audiences by offering a new works festival that features a myriad of artistic endeavors by local artists.

Fertile Ground is an incubator for new work in all forms and stages of creation, offering theatre and dance, workshops, staged readings, readings and multidisciplinary events—for 11 days, at all times of the day, at venues across the city. Offering an astonishing breadth of creative work are seasoned theatre and dance companies alongside new artist-creators of every ilk. Over the past 13 festivals, Fertile Ground has welcomed more than 1,300 "acts of creation" from Portland's artistic communities A full list of [Fertile Ground 2020 events can be found here](#).

The festival provides art-makers and producers a marketing umbrella and professional development opportunities. The annual festival offers a platform that fosters relationships between artists, producers and arts patrons, and deepens an appreciation for the abundant "acts of creation" the region's arts community.

Fertile Ground is committed to the continued examination and expansion of efforts toward equity, inclusion, diversity and accessibility at every level. The festival works toward creating an inclusive, welcoming festival platform shared by intersectional identities and underrepresented voices across race, ethnicity, color, age, gender identity and sexual orientation (*LGBTQ2IA+*), and physical or intellectual ability.

## **ABOUT PORTLAND AREA THEATRE ALLIANCE**

The Portland Area Theatre Alliance (PATA) supports and celebrates our region's vibrant theatre community by fostering opportunity, innovation, and collaboration. [Learn more about PATA](#).

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