

DEAR FELLOW BOARD MEMBERS OF U.S. THEATRES

As Board Members of theatres across the United States, we are dismayed by the news coming out of Chicago about Victory Gardens, a storied organization in our field. Though we may not know all the details, we do know that this post-closure moment is a fragile one. Many of our theatres seek to remake themselves; none are immune to the dynamics that sow division, either directly or indirectly, between boards and staff.

While we refrain here from characterizing what happened at Victory Gardens, two facts are public and indisputable: 1) Over a period of weeks, the board dismissed the staff leadership and then the remaining staff; and 2) In the same period, and without input from professional artists associated with the theatre, the mission of the theatre was overhauled—from a theatre devoted to producing new plays, it was announced by remaining board members that Victory Gardens will now be run as a rental house for other producing companies. The loss of Victory Gardens as an incubator of new work is a major blow to our industry's ecosystem.

At the beginning of the nonprofit theatre field, many boards were established as groups of "Trustees," as distinct from the "Directors" that govern corporate shareholder boards. While each theatre's board structure and expectations may be unique, we all have one fundamental role: to hold our theatre's mission—its principal reason for being—in trust for the communities we represent. Holding a theatre in trust this way is quite different than directing its operations. It is a stewardship that requires centering on the art and the artists and trusting their talent and expertise, even as we partner to balance a budget or provide legal and financial oversight. We commit ourselves to that "trust" at the heart of our job title.

As volunteers who dedicate our time to beloved cultural organizations in our respective cities, let us ensure that what happened in Chicago is an anomaly, not the norm. While we do not speak for every theatre, we have seen how easy it is for boards to silo themselves from the needs of the artists, administrators, and technicians who work to create the theatre they love and support. This is not serving us and our field.

To that end, WE COMMIT to improving relations between the boards of the theatres we sit on and the professional artists and culture workers who give our theatres life. WE ADD our names here to be publicly accountable to this promise. In addition, WE ASK that our colleagues and peer board members across the country add their names to this commitment.

Also, WE ENCOURAGE them to do as many of us have done—contribute to the GOFUNDME campaign set up to help the former staff members of Victory Gardens, each of whom lost their livelihood without warning or explanation and, with it, a reason to trust this profession and devote their energy and talent to its flourishing.

In solidarity for the future of our field,

[READ THE FULL LIST OF SIGNERS, ADD YOUR NAME, AND ACCESS THE GOFUNDME FOR FORMER STAFF MEMBERS AT VICTORY GARDENS.](#)