Auditorium/Black Box Theaters in Libraries: A Mixed Use Facility

Briefing to Quality of Life Committee
October 23, 2006
Purpose

- The purpose of this briefing is to outline the operating policies for the Library Auditorium/Black Box Theaters.
Definition

- A **black box theater** is a simple, unadorned performance space, usually a large square room with black walls and a flat floor. Such spaces are easily built and maintained, and are usually home to plays or other performances with basic technical arrangements—limited sets, simple lighting effects, and an intimate focus on the story, writing, and performances rather than technical elements.
Background

- The concept of developing dual-use facilities that combined the library auditorium with a flexible black box theater was first developed in 2003.

- The goal of the dual-use facilities was to address broad community needs by providing additional performing arts space in neighborhoods (as identified in the City of Dallas Community Cultural Master Plan).

- To accommodate this broader focus, the Library’s building program includes alternative space comparable in size to a traditional branch auditorium to allow library programming to continue uninterrupted.

- Arts, Education & Libraries Council Committee was briefed on June 21, 2004, and the branch library locations identified in each quadrant of the City were approved.
Background

- Four branch libraries funded through the 2003 Bond Program were identified as optimal locations for this initiative:
  - Hampton-Illinois Branch Replacement (opened August 2006)
  - Walnut Hill Branch Replacement
  - Casa View Branch Replacement
  - Pleasant Grove Branch Replacement
- The 2006 Bond Program includes one dual-use auditorium/black box theater at Fretz Park Branch Library.
Overview of Operating Policies

- Usage / Time Allocation
- Programming Objectives
- Selection of Cultural Users
- Basic Rules of Use
- Staffing
- Fees & Costs
Overview of Operating Policies

- The Dallas Public Library Meeting Room Policies will form the basis of the policy for the operations of the auditorium/black box theaters, with the addition of procedures to address performing arts programming.
Dual Usage / Time Allocation

- The auditorium/black box theaters will be **dual-use facilities** managed in partnership by the Dallas Public Library and the Dallas Office of Cultural Affairs.

- Public programs that incorporate both uses will be offered year-round.

- Community and cultural organizations may book the facility pending space availability, technical capacity, room set up limitations, and consistency with the operating policies.
Dual Usage / Time Allocation

- During four months of the year, emphasis will be given to cultural programs of a longer duration (i.e., a multi-week run of a theater production).
- During extended run performing arts productions, use of the auditorium/black box theater for other activities will be limited.
- Each department will be responsible for providing the appropriate resources for the supported programs.
Dual Usage / Time Allocation

- During 2006/07, the months of **October/November** and **February/March** have been identified for extended cultural programming at the Hampton-Illinois Branch Library.

- During these months, library or other community uses can take place in the classroom space.
Programming Objectives

- For cultural programs, OCA will have two primary objectives for the programming that will be presented at the auditorium/black box theaters:
  - Provide neighborhoods with low-cost, family-friendly cultural opportunities.
  - Provide performing arts organizations with professional theater space that allows for the presentation of well-staged productions with quality lighting and sound.
Selection of Users

- The extended period cultural bookings will be developed through an annual "Call for Entries."
  - This process is currently in use at the Bath House Cultural Center, the most comparable of OCA's facilities to the black box theater.
  - Priority will be given to Dallas-based arts and cultural nonprofit organizations and artists, particularly those that do not have a permanent performance facility.
- All programs open to the public will have priority over rehearsals throughout the year.
- Other programs will be booked on a first-come, first-served basis following the Library Meeting Rooms Policy.
Basic Rules of Use

- Consistent with the operations of the other OCA operated cultural centers and with professional practices in the performing arts.
- This information will be provided to all cultural organizations when they apply to book the space.
- Cultural organizations will be able to charge a fee for their programs.
- For the extended run period, the theater will be provided with a basic configuration appropriate for most small and emerging performing arts groups. Any additional set-up and technical changes will be coordinated with OCA.
- User responsible for returning the room to the basic configuration at the conclusion of their event.
Basic Rules of Use

- Seated capacity limited to 80 to 120 [Fire Maximum is 277].
- Promotion and advertisement must use the following credit lines:
  - This program is sponsored, in part, by the City of Dallas Office of Cultural Affairs.
  - This event is not sponsored by the Dallas Public Library.
- Food and beverages not allowed in the space, unless written permission is obtained from the Library Director.
- Use of tobacco, fire, water and gun props will not be permitted.
- Decorations and props are to be provided by the User and must be removed from the premises immediately after the use period.
- All users must adhere to the laws, ordinances, regulations and Library rules.
- Library Code of Conduct must be observed at all times.
Staffing

- Library branch staff will have primary responsibilities for scheduling the facility. Library branch staff will also provide staff support to library programs and community events.

- OCA staff will have scheduling responsibilities for the extended-run cultural programs and coordination and technical support for all cultural programs.
Staffing

- FY06/07 will be a pilot year to determine the level of staffing and resources that will be required to address the technical and space needs from cultural users.
- This year, OCA will provide the staff support with existing resources from our cultural centers.
Fees and Costs

- Dallas Public Library meeting room fees and costs will serve as basis.
- Fees and costs will be monitored during FY06/07 to ensure that the space is affordable to potential users.
Fall 2006 Activities

- To introduce the cultural community to the space, a performing arts series was developed for the October/November period.
- OCA staff coordinated programming with partner organizations and Neighborhood Touring Program artists with a focus on family-friendly programs.
- Developed working partnership with Kraig Willis, Hampton-Illinois Branch Library manager.
Fall 2006 Activities

- Twenty-one programs scheduled from October 14 through November 18.
- Among the cultural organizations performing are:
  - Alegre Ballet Folklórico
  - Dallas Storytelling Guild
  - Echo Theatre
  - Junior Players
  - South Dallas Concert Choir
  - Vistas Film Festival
- Most programs free, with two “pay-what-you-can” programs (donations accepted by arts group).
Fall 2006 Activities

- Promotional activities for Fall 2006 include:
  - 800 flyers through the Jimmie T. Brashear Elementary School
  - 1,000 flyers through Library system
  - 600 postcards mailed to residents of area zip codes using Ice House and Bath House Cultural Centers mailing lists
- Sent e-mail blast and posted on website.
- Distributed press release through PIO.
Next Steps

- Finalize operating policies and procedures.
- Evaluate pilot year for "lessons learned."
- Continue to develop relationship with Hampton-Illinois Branch Library and Jimmie T. Brashear Elementary to maximize leverage of resources to serve community with quality cultural programs.