

County of Marin Community Service Fund Program Application Form

Fields labeled as "(public)" will be viewable to the public.

Request is for Fiscal Year: July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2022

Application Date (public) Thursday, March 31, 2022

Project Number 46

Organization Information

Full Legal Name (public) Alternative Theater Ensemble

Organization URL (public) www.altertheater.org

Mission

What is the mission/purpose of your organization? (Limited to 1000 characters) (public)

AlterTheater seeks to create a more just, more equitable community by:

- supporting the creative growth of theater artists from historically underrepresented communities;
- telling stories that reflect the full complexity and diversity of our community; and
- sharing stories with our full community, in places where people are.

Performing in San Rafael storefronts since 2004, AlterTheater is the only professional BIPOC theater in Marin County, devoted to the belief that excellence in storytelling occurs when all voices are present and empowered. This core value is reflected in the makeup of our board - 80% BIPOC - and in our mainstage productions. Co-founded by 5 artists of diverse backgrounds, including 2 Native American (Onondaga and Chiricahua Apache/Tohono O'odham), AlterTheater has always centered Indigenous voices and practices, creating work in consultation with local elders, as evidenced by our decade-plus partnership with Marin American Indian Alliance.

Grant Request Information

Program/Project Name (public) Pure Native: a new play and arts education program

Provide a very brief summary description of your project. (Limited to 250 characters) (public) AlterTheater will produce a play tackling water rights and traditional Indigenous land stewardship - written, performed, and directed by Native artists – for two weeks in Marin. Artists will teach a 5-day camp, offered free to Marin's Native youth.

Amount Requested Dollar (public) 10000

Total Project Cost (public) 101105

Being as specific as possible, describe the proposed project/program and its goal(s). Include implementation plans as related to the COVID 19 pandemic and identify what elements of the

project would be paid for using County funds. (Limited to 2000 characters) (public)

For 17 years, AlterTheater has produced award-winning theater in downtown San Rafael storefronts. We've launched the careers of numerous BIPOC women playwrights: Larissa FastHorse went on to become the first Native American produced off-Broadway. For Larissa's first AlterTheater commission, she met with members of Marin's unhoused community and downtown San Rafael business owners, creating LANDLESS, which tackled big box stores' impact on 4th Street and the changing face of homelessness after the 2008 recession. The play won the PEN USA Literary Award in Drama.

With COVID safety protocols aligned with union guidelines, we seek to open our first in-person show since 2020's Ghosts of Bogotá (performed in a former jewelry store in partnership with the Latino Council): Pure Native by Vickie Ramirez (Tuscarora).

We request support to rehearse (4 weeks) and perform Pure Native (2 weeks) in Marin.

We also seek to expand Alter's highly successful Arts Learning Project for Native Youth—begun virtually during the pandemic—to serve not just Marin's Native youth but also Marin's Latinx-Indigenous youth, particularly Mayan students. During the pandemic, Native youth experienced higher levels of trauma than any other demographic, from the death of a caretaker to marked increases in suicidal ideation, depression, exacerbated by longtime inequities. ALP4NY holistically incorporates Native health and wellness, youth leadership, cultural practice, and performing arts.

We will hire Pure Native artists Shannon Davis (San Rafael), Steven Flores (San Rafael), Jeanette Harrison (San Rafael), Matt Kizer (Novato) to teach a 5-day sleepaway camp. Artists lead a variety of classes on acting and theater, while Native college staff lead college prep workshops (a majority of youth would be first generation college students). County funds would pay Marin rehearsal space and teaching artists, ensuring Marin Native youth attend free.

List all community interests that will be affected by the proposed project/program and the public benefit to be derived from it. (Limited to 2000 characters) (public)

—HEALTH & SAFETY: A common theme in Native circles in Marin County is invisibility. One member of the Marin American Indian Alliance talks about how she uses her last name as her first to emphasize that Natives are still here. Invisibility has direct consequences on the health and safety of our community members. Public health researcher Abigail Echo-Hawk has written about how a lack of accurate representation leads to erasure in medical data, ineffective public policy created from that data, and a lack of public health support for Native people, including those living in Marin. Our project directly combats invisibility, provides accurate representation, is healing for Natives, and fosters community-wide conversation. This project also connects Marin's Native students with Native youth from across California, Nevada, and Oregon, exposing them to a larger support network, reducing the risk of teen suicide.

AlterTheater's work has always been committed to equity and justice: even before that language existed, Alter was producing work that challenged stereotypes and tackled issues in our community. Now, when the world is finally recognizing the importance of this work, we hope the County considers supporting its only BIPOC professional theatre.

—ARTS EDUCATION: When the pandemic shuttered theaters, we developed an ever-expanding series of virtual arts education workshops designed by Indigenous education specialists and Native artists specifically for Native youth in our community and on reservations.

—INNOVATION: AlterTheater has helped launch the careers of numerous BIPOC artists, from Sullivan (Matt) Jones, a Fairfax native Alter hired straight out of college, who was starring on Broadway when the pandemic hit, to Larissa FastHorse and Lauren Yee, both of whom were on 2020's American Theatre Magazine list of most produced playwrights/plays. AlterTheater is literally changing the face of the American theater from the heart of downtown San Rafael.

Has your organization received Community Service funds before? (public)

Is your organization receiving any other County funding for this project or others? (public)

Can you successfully complete your project by June 30, 2021 if you receive less than your requested amount of Community Service funds? (public)

Applicants are encouraged to leverage funding from other non-County sources, and priority will be given to requests that represent no more than 50% of total project cost. To demonstrate all sources of project funding, including other County sources, please provide a project/program budget below.

Please fill in as applicable, and round to the nearest dollar. (public)

	Funding Agency	Funding Requested (\$)	Funding Received (\$)	Notes
County CSF	Marin County Supervisors	10000		this grant!
Federal Grant	National Endowment for the Arts	62000	15000	awarded
State Grant	California Arts Council	18000	10000	received
Individual Contributions	Hope to bring in another \$3,000 in crowd funder	25000	8190	received
Other Local Agencies	Foundations/grants	45000	25000	received: Novo Foundation, Fleishhacker Foundation, Zellerbach
In kind services	Cal Shakes		5000	awarded
Other	ticket sales, other donors		5000	estimate

Total Funding Requested \$160000

Total Funding Received \$63190

Please fill in as applicable, and round to the nearest dollar.

	Budgeted (\$)	Spent to Date(\$)	Notes
Personnel Costs	70195	2125	reflects implementing AB5, bringing all contractors to employees
Services and Supplies	5000	1800	
Capital			
Other	25910	750	production costs & ALP4NY, including rehearsal space in Marin County

Total Budgeted Expenses (public) \$101105

Total Spent to Date (public) \$4675

This cycle is funded by proceeds from the American Rescue Plan Act and the following questions are necessary to satisfy federal reporting criteria. All applicants are required to respond to these questions for completion of this application, but the responses will not be used in evaluating whether your project will receive Community Service Fund program funds from the County of Marin.

Has your organization been significantly impacted economically by COVID (such as financial loss due to periods of closure, implementing additional COVID safety precautions, lost fundraising opportunities, or inability to meet payroll, rent or utilities?) (public)

Yes

If Yes, please provide a specific description of the impacts and quantifying impact where possible. (public)

In early 2020, AlterTheater was on track for a record-setting year. Only two weeks after we closed Diana Burbano’s wildly successful Rella Lossy Award-winning Ghosts of Bogotá, and about a month before rehearsals of Pure Native by Vickie Ramirez were to begin, the pandemic hit. COVID caught us with only partial funding in place for several programs, and froze all our hoped-for sources for remaining funding. We finished the year nearly \$30,000 less—28% of our total—than originally projected. It’s especially heartbreaking, since AlterTheater’s budget is on a three-year, predictable cycle: steady for two years, then a sharp drop, then the following two years at a higher level than the previous steady two years. This cycle is because 100% of our funding is project-based, and it took us about 16 months to raise 12 months worth of funding. In 2019 we were in one of our dip years, which meant we were unable to meet the requirements of most COVID relief grants. Instead, 100% of our staff began working as volunteers, and we began (eventually) repurposing grants to activities that we could

do while theaters were shut down, such as our playwright residency program.

These past two years of reckoning through a lens of racial and economic equity revealed to us that every single theater company in the Bay Area that made the jump from small to mid-size was supported by family money. BIPOC organizations like ours typically do not have access to those resources. While all theaters were shuttered by COVID, as a Native-led performing arts organization that relies 100% on project-based funding, we were especially vulnerable.

We are also vulnerable because our producing model relies on performing in cramped, poorly ventilated, and usually donated storefront spaces. This year, we will perform outdoors while exploring a permanent space: our home base is San Rafael, and we hope to remain here long-term.

Are you serving disadvantaged, minority or low-income residents who have been negatively impacted by COVID? (public)

Yes

If Yes, please provide a specific description of how the people you serve have been impacted. (public)

Nearly two-thirds of Alter's audiences qualified as low-income pre-pandemic. Both our audiences and our artists have been deeply impacted by COVID. 96% of our artists lost their jobs; many had to move out of Marin or are precariously housed, and some even left the state.

For our Native artists, audiences, and students, the impact is even more deeply felt. While the Navajo Nation made national news as one of the top three hotspots in the country (with New York City), the fact is that smaller Native communities have also been very hard hit, reflecting positivity rates of more than $\frac{2}{3}$ in some areas we serve.

AlterTheater's arts education program began because we had plans to tour Pure Native to reservation communities and lead intergenerational workshops, after producing the show here in San Rafael first. Weeks away from starting rehearsals when the pandemic shut us down, reservations soon followed, and the tour was cancelled. However, in early summer, one of our tribal liaisons reached to out ask us if there was anything we could do with their students. Parents were struggling, as all summer programming was cancelled. Native youth were feeling isolated, alone, and risk factors for suicide and other mental health markers were rising. AlterTheater brought the Pure Native artists together to create a virtual weekling workshop, culminating with professional actors reading monologues written by students. Students' monologues were submitted to Yale's Indigenous Performing Arts Program's national youth monologue contest, and one of our students won in her age category.

Another of our students, at the age of 12, was the caretaker for all her younger siblings, when all the adult caregivers in the home caught COVID. Another student lost her grandfather just after our session.

The pandemic has exacerbated and spotlighted inequities in Marin County, always a place of extreme wealth disparity.

Does your organization have future plans for improvements needed to mitigate the impacts of COVID or to contain its spread? (public)

Yes

If Yes, please provide a description of your improvement plans with quantifying statements when possible. (public)

We have both immediate and long-term plans for improvements. As our audiences and artists include those most vulnerable to COVID, we are especially cautious. As we return to in-person programming, Pure Native is scheduled to perform outdoors, where audiences can distance from one another. Our COVID safety protocols for rehearsals and performance are modeled after both SAG-AFTRA and Actors' Equity guidelines and adhere to CDC, local and state-wide mandates. As always, we will continue to pivot to work in ways that keep our community safe.

AlterTheater is simultaneously working on a long-term solution for space. We've had wonderful (15 years!) relationships with commercial realtors, helping us find and secure donated, temporarily vacant storefronts in downtown San Rafael, and we had been working toward a permanent small storefront of our own. But the pandemic made it clear we need to change our model. Donated storefront spaces fit 49 people total, where audience members and actors are right on top of each other. By performing in storefronts and leaving the windows clear, passersby could "window shop" theater, making theater feel fun and accessible. We believe it will be a long time before people feel comfortable gathering in such close quarters.

We are meeting with the City of San Rafael about outdoor performances, and we are pursuing partnerships with community groups and non-profits that have their own spaces. Even as we move away from cramped storefronts, we are exploring:

- outdoor performances
- touring productions that move from community to community, in partnership with community groups with their own spaces
- working toward a permanent home in downtown San Rafael that we can upgrade to meet COVID safety (including our unions' requirements around HVAC and filtration).

CalShakes in Orinda, CA has offered to share up to 10% of its resources with Alter and other community groups. We need more support, though, from our home community, to

remain rooted in Marin.