**Mazza Strategy, Inc.**

**MEMORANDUM**

To: Joanna Sherman, Artistic Director, Bond Street Theatre

CC: Nadia Gomes, Board Member, Bond Street Theatre

From: Bonnie Mazza, Principal, Mazza Strategy, Inc.

Date: June 26, 2017

Re: Board Retreat Notes and Next Steps

In follow up to the June 13th Bond Street Theatre Board Retreat, I have compiled the notes (included in full at the end of this document); drafted a skeletal strategic plan for BST complete with “impact” and “operational” goals; and provided a template for BST’s use as it creates an implementation plan for the achievement of its strategies.

The June 13th meeting included four board members and four staff; three additional board members contributed via conversations and emailed notes prior to the conversation (these thoughts have been integrated into the meeting notes). During the meeting, individuals spent time getting to know one another a bit better, discussing what they find most compelling about BST, and articulating their aspiration for BST going forward—both in terms of the organization’s impact and internal capacities. Finally, as a future direction began to take shape, participants were able to begin articulating a set of objectives for the board to help position BST to meet its goals. This meeting served as an excellent jumping off point for BST in the articulation of its strategic goals for the next three years. It was also a useful way to get a better sense of the board’s current capacities, interests, and appetite for engagement.

Moving forward, BST will want to continue to engage with its board as it further fleshes out the strategic plan and ultimately seeks the board’s approval. Immediate next steps should include:

* A 60-minute conversation with the Board to present the plan outline, gather feedback, and activate a strategic planning committee of the board which will continue to build on and refine the governance goal and objectives and agree on a timeline for completion of the plan;
* A series of staff meetings during which the plan is discussed and strategies and benchmarks are articulated;
* Drafting a full implementation plan to support the realization of the strategic goals; and
* Circulation of the summary plan (goals, objectives, and strategies) to the full board for approval.

As BST works to complete the strategic plan and engage the board, I am available to help in a number of ways, should BST desire further support. This could take the form of facilitated meetings; coaching and guidance on the implementation plan as it takes shape; and/or supporting the board as it fleshes out the governance goal and moves towards implementation.

The June 13th meeting notes follow.

**Bond Street Theatre**

**Board Retreat**

**June 13, 2017**

**MEETING NOTES**

**Participants**: Staff: Joanna Sherman; Michael McGuigan; Emma Dolhai; and Heddy Lahman-Rosen

Board: Ethel Barber; Ethan Frisch; Nadia Gomes; and Alice Leopold (The following board members provided input in advance of the meeting: Heather Balke; Mary Dino; and Frank Juliano.)

**Facilitator**: Bonnie Mazza, Mazza Strategy, Inc.

1. **Welcome and Introductions**

Participants were asked to introduce themselves, specify their role with BST, and answer 2 questions: 1) what do you find most compelling about BST? And 2) what makes you feel personally connected to the work of the organization? Answers focused on BST’s **unique approach utilizing the arts** and its openness to a variety of art forms; and the **combination of arts and community development/peace building**. Personal connection ranged from personal relationships to a deep interest in the arts and social justice. All responses are included below:

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| **What do you find most compelling about BST?** | **What drives your personal connection to BST?** |
| Unique approach with the arts | Social justice issues and issues of inequality |
| Spectacular work that BST does | Initial meeting at a Women Rising event |
| Arts in areas of difficulty/conflict—both the idea of bringing the arts to these areas and the way in which the arts are leveraged to build peace | Bringing peace and the arts to areas of conflict |
| Use of theater to enable others to set their *own* narrative | Perfect mixture of my theater background and work in the nonprofit sector |
| The approach of BST and the openness to different art and cultural forms | Ability to perform and create, and particularly pursue the use of mixed methodologies |
| Firm belief that we can make a positive change in the world and know the approach works | Explicit activism of the work—like that BST has a social justice agenda (and at the same time, allows for participants to set their own specific agenda) |
| People love the arts—it’s a great way to reach many people | New frontiers and new cultures |
| BST’s growth over the years | The relationships I’ve built directly with BST and through BST |

1. **Opening Discussion—BST Context, Aspirations, and Opportunities**

Joanna and Bonnie presented information on BST’s current context (i.e., the political and funding atmosphere; BST’s current criteria for programmatic expansion; and BST’s current strategic questions: How BST’s approach may be applicable to a range of issues (e.g., environment) and whether it may make sense to begin doing some work domestically). Bonnie also reported back on the findings from BST’s board survey.

Joanna reviewed five organizations that BST believes are doing similar work: Right to Play; Artists for Human Rights; Artists for Peace & Justice; Playback Theatre; and Common Ground. The benchmarking slides are included in the appendix.

Within this competitive landscape, many of the groups focused on a more narrow geographic area and in some cases, had a very specific performing arts methodology which they worked to impart. All used arts as a means to address issues of social justice in an international context. Critical **differentiators** of BST’s work were established during the conversation and included:

* BST’s ability to apply the work in many different contexts (different countries and different issues areas);
* Global nature of BST (many countries);
* The use of mixed performing arts methodologies;
* Cohesive company—you know who you are getting with BST, not a loose affiliation of actors, etc.;
* Ability to move between the arts and community development—extreme competence in two related, but distinct fields;
* Process by which BST helps participants to identify the issues that are most important to them to address;
* BST trains its participants to create their *own* productions, rather than put on Shakespeare, etc.;
* BST directly engages the community—by working directly with participants and then facilitating participants to further engage the larger community through performances, community clean-ups, discussions, etc.;
* Focus on practical end results;
* BST has a strong network of existing partnerships all over the world;
* BST’s approach can be applied towards a whole range of outcomes, additionally, there are a given set of “process outcomes” relating to empowerment, leadership, civic engagement, etc. that are engrained in the process regardless of the issue chosen (i.e., domestic violence, voting, etc.)

Throughout the conversation, in addition to differentiators, participants highlighted their aspirations for BST, brainstormed about the opportunities before the organization, and considered the barriers that must be overcome if BST is to reach its goals:

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| **Aspirations** |
| **Teach**—participants in the room and board members in their emails highlighted a desire to free up Joanna and Michael to do more teaching.   * Consider **convening** other internationally focused performance artists to share and learn from one another (would be thought leadership, chance to promote the model, and play a convening role) |
| **Share the BST model** with others to expand its impact |
| **Replicate the spoke model** created in Afghanistan in additional countries (independent, self-sustaining, staff on the ground, comprehensive reach, strong partners)…consider becoming a Network of local Hubs (Hub and spoke model) |
| **Create more activists** and place a greater emphasis on promoting civic engagement/building civic capacity (and domestic programs to foster greater dialogue) |
| **Serve Syrian refugees** by focusing on countries receiving high numbers of refugees |
| **Become better known and consider working in the US**—aspire to be known and funded in the US; also open to/interested in exploring opportunities to deliver programming in the US |
| **Opportunities** |
| **Raise Awareness**, particularly in the US. More demonstrations/awareness-raising through local performances (Domestically) “Play in Traffic” be more strategic about placing BST (and its board members) at events where unexpected, but interested potential supporters may be found (i.e., arts benefits, parades, etc.) |
| **New audiences**, including clinical work—BST’s work can be used in service to those with PTSD, child survivors of human and/or sex trafficking, and a range of others. Opportunity to better detail the urgency of the work and BST’s ability to address trauma to enable the success of other interventions (i.e., social services). |
| **More partnerships** with existing social justice organizations and member associations to better enable reach to foreign governments and greater civic engagement (BST would be providing new tools to pre-established and civically inclined groups to increase their effectiveness). |
| **Highlight different/more outcomes to reach more funders**: building civic engagement for other areas of private and government funding (i.e., anti-corruption, state-building, justice, civic engagement, etc.) |
| **Barriers** |
| **Funding**—need for very tailored and specific pitches; feel stuck with program-specific funding, have not yet broken into organization-wide funding |
| **Marketing and outreach**—lack of clarity around exact brand identity and *who* we are trying to reach |
| **Brand awareness**—not clearly communicating the brand, need to solidify and protect the brand, especially before beginning to share BST’s approach with others. Consider how to ensure that the programs align with/can better align with the brand. |
| **Shifting interests of funders and supporters**—what and where is “sexy” in international development shifts constantly—does BST make lasting commitments to a selection of countries or work to be first on the scene in areas of need? |
| A **variety of outcomes** are achieved by BST’s work—can be hard to know which to prioritize and highlight. |
| **Partisan perceptions** in the US are a concern if BST is to pursue work domestically—will have to overcome assumptions about the politics of the organization |

A few additional organizations of interest and potential connections of board members surfaced during the conversation and included:

* HEAR-consortium of artists in NY
* Alice is part of a network of business women that post for and screen members for placement on nonprofit boards

1. **Visioning Exercise**

Participants divided into two groups to further discuss BST’s current positioning and engage in the following exercise:

*It is 2022. Bond Street Theatre is the focus of an article in the NY Times entitled: Leveraging the Nonprofit Board—Nonprofits who have done it right! The article highlights the impact of BST and goes on to speak about the ways in which the board was instrumental in supporting the organization in achieving its results. You are being interviewed for the article—please respond to the following:*

* + 1. What is the impact of BST you will emphasize and hope to have highlighted in the article?
    2. How, if at all, has BST grown its footprint (either through direct touch or sharing of its approach)?
    3. What specific organizational capacities were built in order to position BST to have this impact? (i.e., what critical investments were made in the organization’s staffing, infrastructure, partnerships, etc.?) Name only three.

Participants spent thirty-five minutes in small group and then reported back:

**Group 1: (Joanna, Ethel, Ethan, and Emma)**

* Impact: Activating creative communities to engage in catalytic relationships
* Footprint: a) Emphasis on international work—strengthening links between BST and international partners; building a more diverse partner network (e.g., social justice organizations, etc.); and b) Partnerships with domestic activist/social theater organizations for sharing ideas (e.g., curricula, outreach, and other methodologies, etc.)
* Capacities: Staff roles: CEO to focus on development, exposure, and strategy (building relationships with foundations and diversifying funding); COO/CFO to focus on operations and finances as well as act as a resource to international partners (i.e., to play a role in building capacity of others); Marketing to work on clear branding and exposure.

**Group 2: (Michael, Alice, Nadia, and Heddy)**

* Impact: BST successfully uses the arts as a tool to engage individuals across ideological divides in informed dialogue, both internationally and domestically
* Footprint: Hub & spoke model; train the trainers (expanding training of artistic teams for international work); replicating international model domestically
* Capacities: Staff roles: add a development/marketing person; Monitoring and Evaluation role; project management (to help with big picture programmatic direction/implementation); financial management. Clear roles and expectations for all.

**Visioning Discussion Summary**:

Impact: BST’s role will be to “activate and catalyze” informed dialogue across ideological divides.

Footprint: *Internationally*, BST will continue to emphasize its international role and expand its reach. This will be done by:

* Increasing and diversifying strategic partnerships and building a *network* of partners;
* Expanding its training program to allow for more than one team to travel and do the work; and
* Continue a hub & spoke model (i.e., similar model to that which has been implemented in Serbia and Afghanistan) that relies on strong partnerships

*Domestically*, BST will work to build its reputation get invited to more places to share BST’s work, and consider delivering programming as opportunities arise.

Capacities: BST requires more staff, greater division of responsibilities, and increased role clarity. Specifically, BST would like to enhance its development capacity; have someone who is able to manage the day-to-day of the organization focusing on operations and financial management; have a project management role—someone who understands the “big picture” and can help connect the dots between new ideas, new programming, and existing offerings; clarify its brand and invest in further marketing; build its partnerships; consider a separate office space; diversity its funding; and invest in the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of its results. Finally, prior to sharing BST’s approach with others, it must first firm up its brand (to protect its ideas).

1. **Articulating BST’s Governance Goals**

With a clearer understanding of BST’s intended future direction, the full group worked together to consider the most appropriate roles and necessary investments of the board to help position BST to meet its goals:

1. **Board Size and Composition:**

* Grow the board size (ideally closer to 15 or so people);
* Desired skills:
  + Existing background in and proven track record of successful fundraising (provide BST with additional perspective on potential funders (foundation and corporate) and offer feedback on proposals)
  + Significant board experience with other NGO boards, particularly larger organizations
  + Nonprofit management expertise
  + Marketing expertise
  + Connection with civil society groups (e.g., churches, large networking groups, Rotary Club, etc.), based in affluent areas
  + International interests/affiliations, but logistically manageable (e.g., UN/UN-related)
  + Awareness of the field—both peacebuilding/community development and arts
  + Access to diverse networks
  + Increase racial/ethnic diversity to be more reflective of BST’s work
  + Recruitment tip: Alice is part of a group that places execs on nonprofit boards (100 Women in Finance <https://100women.org/initiatives/#the-philanthropy-initiatives>)

1. **Clarify Board/Staff Roles:**

* Build the strategic role of the board
* Open doors
* Guide strategic direction
* Increase board accountability with regular board self-assessments

1. **Fundraising and Ambassadorship:**

* All board members are expected to fundraise
* BST should be amongst every board member’s top 1-2 charitable priorities
* Able to speak about BST and committed to bringing it up frequently
* Represent BST at different events (especially those that may find unlikely allies) “Play in Traffic” at least 6 times a year

1. **Wrap Up and Next Steps**

As the meeting closed, participants were asked to write down their answers to three questions: 1) what from today’s discussion was new for you? 2) About what from today’s discussion are you most excited? 3) What immediate next step will you take to help BST achieve the goals set forward today?

Respondents noted the following:

*New:*

* What the board sees, knows, and wants to see
* Hub and spoke model (2)
* Domestic partnerships and partnering with other arts organizations
* Connections to activist and social justice organizations
* Clear vision
* In-depth discussion of domestically-focused goals
* Good thoughts, but not new

*Excited About:*

* A more engaged board
* The potential for building new and varied partnerships
* Possibility of expanded board, with knowledge specific to BST strategy
* Considering roles and position of our board
* Prospect of more domestic outreach
* Training partners and expanding artist teams and domestic engagement
* Breadth of BST opportunities
* Proper staffing

*Next Steps:*

* Follow up with each board member for further thoughts (Joanna)
* Expand contacts, reconnect with potential board members (Ethel)
* Attend more events and engage more people as donors, volunteers, and supporters (Ethan)
* Consider organizations and potential domestic partnerships; marginalized populations with whom BST might work (Heddy)
* Clarify in writing own personal staff role, goals, and benchmarks going forward as a remote staff member (Emma)
* Help turn today’s decisions into an action plan and strategy (Nadia)
* Work on gold standards for the board and recruit for the board (Alice)
* Articulate a clear budget and what we have available ($, staff skills, etc.) (Michael)

Finally, the group agreed it would come together by phone for a follow-up conversation in the coming weeks and agree on a plan for further building out the emergent strategic plan. A draft version of the impact and operational goals emerging from the day’s conversation along with a set of planning definitions and implementation plan template are included in a separate document.