

Victory Gardens Theater

Artistic Director

Organization

Founded in 1974, Victory Gardens Theater (Victory Gardens) is centered on the development of playwrights and new plays and is widely recognized as an innovator in the American theatrical canon. The recipient of the 2001 Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre, Victory Gardens is dedicated to artistic excellence while creating a vital, contemporary theater that is accessible to all people through quality productions of challenging new plays and musicals. Its mission is to nurture and produce relevant new theater work that reflects the diverse stories of our world and contributes to the vitality of the American Theater. Victory Gardens' work inspires dialogue towards meaningful civic change and creates an inclusive theater experience that belongs to everyone. Victory Gardens' vision is to be the leader in bringing stories to the stage that help ignite social change for a better world. Its core strength is producing dynamic and inspiring new plays, reflecting the diversity of the city and nation's culture by engaging diverse communities. In partnership with Chicago Public Schools, Victory Gardens also brings art and culture to the city's active student population.

Victory Gardens' home is the historic Biograph Theater in the Lincoln Park neighborhood of Chicago. This 1914 building, originally built as a movie house, is on the National Register of Historic Places and is a designated Chicago landmark. The building was purchased by Victory Gardens in 2004 and, after a successful \$11.8 million renovation, became its official home in 2006. Renamed Victory Gardens Biograph Theater, the new venue's state-of-the-art 299-seat mainstage greatly expanded the company's artistic flexibility. In 2009, Victory Gardens completed the second phase of renovation at the Biograph, building an intimate new 109-seat studio theater on the second floor. At a special launch event for Victory Gardens' \$11.8 million Campaign for Growth in 2010, the theater's new studio was officially named the Richard Christiansen Theater in honor of *Chicago Tribune* chief critic emeritus and longtime champion of Chicago's live theater scene.

Victory Gardens is perhaps best known for its Playwrights Ensemble, which develops and produces new plays through readings, workshops, and productions and provides necessary resources to further cultivate their individual voices and craft. Throughout their seven-year residencies, the playwrights are involved in the artistic life of the theater, engage with audiences throughout Chicago's diverse communities, and participate in Victory Gardens' educational and community programs. Joining the alumni after the residency concludes, playwrights maintain an artistic relationship with Victory Gardens.

Victory Gardens has a long history of widening theater access to marginalized communities. Since the mid-1990s, the organization has been a leader in serving people with disabilities through The Access Project. This nationally recognized model designates certain performances as Access Nights that offer a menu of services to patrons with mobility impairment, blind or low-vision, and deaf or low-hearing. Among the services offered is word for word captioning for select performances, where dialogue and descriptions of atmospheric sounds and music cues are displayed on the side of the stage. Most recently, Victory Gardens has focused on fostering diverse voices in the next generation of theater leaders through the Directors Inclusion Initiative and the Next Generation Fellowship. These programs aim to support the development of emerging Chicago stage directors who identify as people of color, disabled, women, transgender, gender non-conforming, and LGBTQ.

The StudentsFirst initiative furthers Victory Gardens' commitment to serving Chicago youth through immersive arts education. Drama in the Schools allows experienced teaching artists to partner with classroom teachers to lead students through sessions that encourage them to find and use their voices. The Scholarship Subscription Series is a citywide program giving partner schools the opportunity to attend productions at Victory Gardens.

Victory Gardens is governed by a 19-member board of directors, led by President Charles E. Harris II. For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2020, reported total revenue was \$3.3 million, with approximately \$2.6 million from contributions and grants and \$722,000 from program service revenue. Total expenses were approximately \$2.9 million.

Community

Chicago is the third largest city in the United States with a population of 2.7 million residents. Located along the shores of Lake Michigan, the city has a unique spirit and community unlike large cities on the two coasts. Chicago has been, in the words of Mark Twain, the place that is “always rubbing the lamp, fetching up the genii, contriving and achieving new impossibilities.” Recognizing its appeal to visitors, Condé Nast readers have selected Chicago as the Best Big City in the United States four years in a row. A diverse and vibrant place to live, Chicago has the community of an intimate small town but offers a myriad of amenities for its residents, including a world-class collection of arts and cultural offerings. Chicago has a robust public transportation system, two international airports directly connected to local trains, and pre-pandemic job growth that outpaced the country in 2019.

Chicago is often described as a city of neighborhoods, with more 77 distinct communities, each characterized for their unique flair and offerings of local restaurants, businesses, and entertainment options. Chicago’s cultural life includes a host of prominent cultural institutions and the city has one of the strongest theater communities in the United States, with more than 240 independent nonprofit theaters calling the city home, including Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Goodman Theatre, The Second City, and Chicago Shakespeare Theater.

Chicago offers a wide array of year-round outdoor activities. The Chicago Park District is the largest in the United States, with more than 8,800 acres of green space and 600 parks. Millennium Park, which opened in 2004, is the home to a host of summertime concerts at Jay Pritzker Pavilion and a variety of festivals, including Lollapalooza, the Chicago Blues, Gospel Music, and Jazz Festivals, and many more. In addition to its acclaimed restaurant scene and strong retail market, Chicago is home to several award-winning sports teams. From a business perspective, Illinois is home to 36 Fortune 500 companies, 10 of which are headquartered in Chicago, including Boeing, McDonald’s, United Airlines Holdings, Mondelez International, and Conagra Brands. Chicago’s technology sector is growing rapidly, with nearly 100,000 workers in the city who enhance technological innovations world-wide.

Chicago embraces and celebrates its diversity. Currently estimated at 30 percent Black, 29 percent Latino, 6.4 percent Asian, and 33 percent white with a growing multi-ethnic population, Chicago’s cultural community strives to engage and support Chicagoans of all backgrounds in creative expression. Forty languages are spoken in Chicago households, with Spanish and Polish being the most common. Boasting a vibrant LGBTQ+ community, Chicago is home to Northalsted, country’s first officially designated gay neighborhood, and has a full month of Pride celebrations each year.

Sources: choosechicago.com, chicago.gov, census.gov, leagueofchicagotheatres.org

Position Summary

The Artistic Director will provide an artistic vision and strategic direction that embraces Victory Gardens’ long-standing commitment to new works and innovative theater. Dedicated to diversity, equity, inclusion, and access in all that they do, this creative leader will build upon Victory Gardens’ legacy of nurturing and producing relevant new theater work that is inspired by and reflective of diverse voices and stories of contemporary society. Guided by the mission and vision, the Artistic Director will conceptualize, develop, and deliver inventive and lively programming that provides an inclusive theater experience for a growing audience and demonstrates the commitment to nurturing and producing the work of new playwrights. Cognizant of the pandemic’s impact on the performing arts, the Artistic Director will be open to exploring new artistic forms and production models. This dynamic artist will enthusiastically represent the organization to multiple constituencies, advancing partnerships and deepening the engagement with Chicago’s diverse communities. They will enthusiastically participate in the cultivation and stewarding of donors, actively collaborating with the Executive Director to ensure the organization’s long-term sustainability. An innate collaborator, the Artistic Director will be a thought leader for civic change who builds on theater’s unique ability to foster meaningful dialogue about societal issues.

Roles and Responsibilities

Artistic Vision and Leadership

- Create a stimulating, fresh, and forward-thinking artistic vision that is inspired by and built on Victory Gardens’ legacy of developing new work with emerging and leading playwrights, embracing equity and inclusion.
- Conceptualize, develop, and implement a theatrical season in line with the mission, vision, and values.
- Lead the artistic and production teams, setting and maintaining high artistic and production standards and ensuring a positive and safe workspace and creative environment for all artists and technicians.

- Provide thoughtful and strong leadership and guidance to directors, choreographers, designers, music directors, and other involved artists, working closely in partnership with production teams.
- Support the Casting Director in the selection of actors for productions, ensuring a fair and inclusive casting process.
- Engage in concerted work with the Literary Manager for the successful production of IGNITION Festival of new Plays, as well as season planning and development.
- Approve the slate for the Directors Inclusion Initiative in mutual agreement with the Artistic Programs Manager.
- Partner with the ACCESS coordinator to approve all programs and activities and approve and supervise all artistic programming in cooperation with the Education team.
- Incorporate personal artistry into each year's programming in some capacity to engage directly with other artists and Victory Gardens' constituents.
- Develop and cultivate creative and artistic relationships with local, national, and international playwrights and theater artists, evaluating potential partners for new projects.
- Actively engage in the local, regional, and national theater sector by attending plays and productions.
- Commission playwrights for premieres and other projects, managing the commission process and mentoring and nurturing new voices.

Community Engagement and Partnerships

- Serve as spokesperson and ambassador for the artistic purpose and vision of the organization, participating in speaking engagements, public and social appearances, and fundraising and donor cultivation events.
- Foster positive interactions with arts and cultural organizations at the local, regional, and national levels by participating in convenings, joint activities, and professional associations' boards, committees, and panels.
- Cultivate strategic partnerships to advance the organization's artistic and community engagement goals.
- Build positive and impactful relationships with community-based organizations that engage people with Victory Gardens' programming and support the organization's diversity, equity, and inclusion commitments and efforts.
- Keep abreast of critical issues and conversations that impact the theater community, including the recent "We See You, White American Theater" article.

Management and Administration

- Develop a deep and positive working relationship with the board of directors, reporting regularly on the organization's artistic activity.
- Conceive, develop, and implement strategies to ensure that the organization has a sustainable business model with a healthy appetite for artistic risk in partnership with the Managing/Executive Director.
- Engage in the organization's revenue enhancement activities, coordinating with the Development Director to cultivate and steward donors and actively take part in development and fundraising activities.
- Participate in the development of the annual program budget.
- Formulate and implement evaluation strategies for artistic and educational programming.
- Hire and provide day-to-day oversight and supervision to the Production Manager, Technical Director, and other key technical personnel—visibly providing support, establishing work plans, and evaluating performance.
- Cultivate and foster a supportive work environment driven by integrity, diversity, innovation, and excellence.
- Promote the creative and professional development of team members as valuable assets to the organization, recruiting and retaining the highest quality staff and artistic talent.
- Cooperate with the Director of Marketing and the marketing team to oversee branding, public messaging, advertising, social media, and other public communications.

Traits and Characteristics

The Artistic Director will be a thoughtful and creative leader, passionate about the theater and personally engaged in advancing the values of equity and inclusion. They will be motivated by new ideas, methodologies, and approaches that expand the reach of theatrical activity. Using an inherently collaborative approach, the Artistic Director will be supportive of their team and appreciate their collective efforts. They will intuitively use past experiences and seek knowledge to achieve their artistic vision. This individual will be comfortable interacting

frequently with a variety of people, easily adapting to changing circumstances. Decisive, assertive, and fast acting, the Artistic Director will take advantage of situations that advance the organization's mission.

Other key competencies of the role include:

- **Leadership and Diplomacy** – The ability to inspire and influence others with an exciting artistic vision, building trust that supports creative risks, and leveraging networks of influence to advance the organization's mission.
- **Teamwork** – The capacity to drive team decisions towards consensus, respecting individual perspectives and appreciating and recognizing the contributions of team members towards their shared purpose.
- **Futuristic Thinking** – The foresight to envision expanded artistic possibilities, championing cutting-edge ideas and concepts and crafting an environment where creative thinking is the norm, not the exception.
- **Self-Starting and Personal Accountability** – The disposition and confidence to take initiative with assertiveness and persistence and the ability to self-evaluate and accept responsibility for actions and results.
- **Time and Priority Management** – The aptitude to ascertain competing priorities, resolve difficulties and overcome obstacles, and maximize the use of time and resources to attain the desired artistic outcomes.

Qualifications

Artistic leadership experience in a producing theatrical organization with a demonstrated track record commissioning and producing new works by emerging and established playwrights is required. Knowledge and familiarity with the Chicago, regional, and national artistic communities, including casting agents, actors, designers and directors is necessary. Extensive knowledge of theatrical union contracts (Actors' Equity Association, Society of Directors and Choreographers, American Federation of Musicians, and United Scenic Artists), with union negotiation experience, is preferred.

Compensation and Benefits

Victory Gardens offers a competitive salary commensurate with results-oriented experience. The benefits package includes paid time off; medical and dental insurance; and pension, educational, and wellness programs. The starting salary is expected to be in the range of \$100,000 to \$110,000.

Applications and Inquiries

To submit a cover letter and resume with a summary of demonstrable accomplishments (electronic submissions preferred), please click [here](#) or visit artsconsulting.com/employment. For questions or general inquiries about this job opportunity, please contact:

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“Victory Gardens Theater aspires to produce theater and programming that reflect the rich diversity of our city, nation, and the world. Our board, staff, and artists recognize theater is a catalyst for social change towards a more just and inclusive society. We are committed to empathy and celebrating our differences through our productions, town halls, panel discussions, Directors Inclusion Initiative, and other programs.”