



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Jeffrey Marks – Media Chair, [312-606-0400](tel:312-606-0400)

or media@jeffawards.org

Jeff Awards Releases Research Project Findings, Acting on Key Issues Identified

December 11, 2017, Chicago. The Jeff Awards received the results of an independent research project, is sharing the results with the public, and is acting on key issues identified. Taproot+ conducted the project among Chicago area theatre companies. Taproot+ is a non-profit organization that provides pro bono services by volunteer professionals.

The research project was conducted in two phases from May through October, targeting Managing Directors (or equivalent title) and Artistic Directors among Chicago area theatres. The first phase was comprised of phone interviews among a cross-section of 21 theatres. The second phase was an online survey sent to all Chicago theatres listed with the Jeff Awards. Those responding were assured that the results would be made public with responses reported in the aggregate. Individual names and responses are kept confidential with the research team. The Report identifies three key areas: membership, communications and partnerships.

“As we begin the 50th anniversary year of the Jeff Awards, we are moving forward with ways to improve in these three areas as well as celebrate past achievements,” said David Liesse, Jeff Awards chairman. “Using the Taproot+ recommendations and after much discussion, we will continue honoring excellence in the Chicago theatre community with renewed enthusiasm.”

A major recommendation from the research was to diversify the 55 Committee membership. The current time commitment of seeing more than 150 shows annually was found to be a major barrier to broadening membership. The Committee had already begun instituting a proactive recruitment initiative with minority organizations and will increase the effort. Another suggestion was to reduce the number of shows members see by broadening an existing option of being on rotation (seeing Equity shows for one season, then rotating to Non-Equity for the next season) which could reduce the time commitment

in half and entice more applicants. That change would also possibly reduce the number of comp tickets provided from theatres for members to review productions.

Poor communications and lack of transparency of Jeff Awards rules and policies, particularly the voting structure, was another major finding in the research report. Subcommittees are being formed to conduct a thorough review of the opening night voting structure and rules, the role of the Artistic/Technical team, addressing final ballot concerns, and whether “Jeff Recommended” vs another term should be used for opening night results for theatres’ publicity use.

In addition to improving communications, ways to interact with the theatre community for its input are being explored. Ideas to form joint committees and task forces to address complex issues are being explored. A revamp of the web site is being undertaken, and a quarterly newsletter, are other communication activities in progress.

Forming partnerships with theatre and other arts organization was another strong recommendation in the research report. Education programs on specific theatre topics with a panel of theatre experts are already held at Jeff membership meetings. The committee is looking at ways of using these program concepts for the broader theatre community and theatre-going public in partnership with other organizations.

Appointing an Outreach Coordinator is under consideration. In addition to conducting programs open to the public, other considerations are awarding a scholarship to a theatre student, more education information on the new website, videos on YouTube and more communications about these activities.

A first step in sharing information with the theatre community was a presentation of research results at the League of Chicago Theatres event for Managing Directors on Monday, December 11th. The report in PDF format can be downloaded from the Jeff Awards website at www.jeffawards.org.

The Jeff Awards has been honoring outstanding theatre artists annually since it was established in 1968. With up to 55 members representing a wide variety of backgrounds in theatre (including producers, directors, actors, playwrights, designers, professors of theatre, entertainment lawyers and agents and theatre lovers), the Jeff Awards is committed to celebrating the vitality of Chicago area theatre by recognizing excellence through its recommendations, awards and honors. Opening night judges include not only Jeff members but also the team of Arts and Technical theatre volunteers (the “A/T Team”) which is comprised of artistic directors, producers, directors from major Chicago theatres, actors and designers. The Jeff Awards fosters the artistic growth of area theatres and theatre artists and promotes educational opportunities, audience appreciation and civic pride in the achievements of the theatre community. Each year, the Jeff Awards judges 300 theatrical productions and host two awards ceremonies. Originally chartered to recognize only Equity productions, the Jeff Awards established the Non-Equity Wing in 1973 to celebrate outstanding achievement in non-union theatre.

###