

**Legal Name**

East West Players

**Project Title**

To host {Snehal Desai} at {East West Players} to imagine and explore new approaches to demand building for theatre

**DDCF Grant Number**

2013234

**Project Progress and Successes**

The goal of the project is to build audiences within the South Asian and South Asian American communities in southern California, a community that is rapidly growing but whose potential as an audience and subscriber base is largely untapped.

To accomplish this, East West Players has been strategically focusing on South Asian artistic content, as well as building its relationship with South Asian artists, community leaders, organizations, and media outlets to develop artistic works about and for the South Asian community and reach South Asian audiences.

Since the start of the project, EWP has produced one Mainstage production by a South Asian American playwright and featuring a predominantly South Asian cast, the world premiere of Madhuri Shekar's A NICE INDIAN BOY. Audience surveys for this production reflected a marked demographic shift, with South Asians forming 22% of the audience (historically, South Asians have made up only about 1% of EWP audiences.)

Additionally, EWP offered a free reading (in partnership with Pasadena's A Noise Within theatre) of a classical Indian play, HAYAVADANA by Girish Karnad (June 16, 2014). Both A NICE INDIAN BOY and HAYAVADANA were directed by project artist Snehal Desai.

During the 2014-15 Mainstage season, EWP will continue to increase South Asian content, with two plays by South Asian writers: ANIMALS OUT OF PAPER by Pulitzer prize nominated playwright Rajiv Joseph (September 4 - October 5, 2014) and the world premiere of WASHER/DRYER by Nandita Shenoy (February 12 - March 15, 2015).

**Challenges / Obstacles / Failures Encountered in the Project**

The primary challenge was to reach the target demographic - the South Asian community in southern California. We found that this demographic was too broad to be effectively reached by a single strategy, and the first step was to focus more closely on various groups within this demographic, narrowing it down by age group, geographic area, first generation immigrants vs. second and third generation South Asian Americans, etc.

Another challenge was getting potential audiences to engage consistently - most of the

audiences we approached viewed their theatre attendance as a one-off experience rather than a habit, and we faced the challenge of turning casual theatre-goers into regular attendees and season subscribers.

**What was learned from these that might be of benefit to others?**

We learned that there is no "one-size-fits-all" solution, but that there are several strategies we can pursue to continue growing this sector of our audience.

Overall, while South Asians are enthusiastic to see their community represented on stage, they do not want to be pandered to or condescended to with very traditional portrayals and common tropes. EWP's ongoing strategy in terms of artistic programming - reflected in two of the four mainstage productions in our 2014-15 season - is to showcase work by South Asian writers and featuring South Asian characters as a matter of course, but featuring plots and characters that are not necessarily traditional or typical "South Asian stories."

**Links to relevant website(s) and/or project publications, reports, etc.**

EWP's website:

[www.eastwestplayers.org](http://www.eastwestplayers.org)

Project artist Snehal Desai:

[www.snehaldesai.com](http://www.snehaldesai.com)

Partner organizations:

[www.anoisewithin.org](http://www.anoisewithin.org)

[www.southasianplaywrights.org](http://www.southasianplaywrights.org)

**If someone wishes to speak with your organization further about your project, would there be a willing contact? Y/N**

If yes, please provide contact name and information for preferred method of contact (email, phone, etc).

Y

Snehal Desai

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