



**A Summary of Toronto Fringe's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Audit**

*Compiled by Toronto Fringe's Staff and Board*

*June 2021*

**Excerpted from full Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Audit**

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## About the Audit

In June 2020, the Toronto Fringe committed to undertaking an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) audit. Fringe retained Sedina Fiati and Candice Frederick from Where You Are Consulting to facilitate this process, beginning with conversations between Executive Director Lucy Eveleigh and Sedina Fiati in late summer 2020. In fall 2020, Candice Frederick joined the process and we mapped out the plan for the audit.

As the organization's current strategic plan is due to be revisited in fall 2021, this felt like an ideal moment to further infuse and embed EDI principles into all aspects of operations. Another part of the impetus for undergoing this audit was to ensure that The Toronto Fringe Festival was thinking critically about representation, access, and support following both the advocacy of Black Lives Matter and coming out of Indigenous pipeline protests that caused our city and country to reflect on marginalization and intersectionality in various ways.

The following is a summary of the main points of the 40+ page document that was presented to us in May 2021. The Toronto Fringe team, along with the Board of Directors, is currently creating an action/work plan to assign timelines and priorities to the findings below. We have already started much of this work and what remains will be integrated into our overall strategic plan in the fall. If you have any comments or feedback you would like to share with the Fringe after reading this summary document please do not hesitate to contact Executive Director Lucy Eveleigh ([lucy@fringetoronto.com](mailto:lucy@fringetoronto.com)) or the Board Chair, Jason Murray ([board@fringetoronto.com](mailto:board@fringetoronto.com)).

The following has been edited from the full 40+ page EDI Audit for summary purposes.

### Statement from Consulting Team (excerpt)

"We see equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) as a framework that asks us to look at our intentions in our relationships and in our systems. This requires some deep thinking about accountability, an opportunity to re-examine how we have always done things, and how we change. Investigating how we hold and share institutional/organizational power will allow a shift toward better practices and relationships.

In order to carve new ways forward that use intersectional\* and social justice\*\* frameworks, we have to first understand what went wrong. Only then can we move toward repair."

#### - Sedina Fiati and Candice Frederick

Where You Are Consulting

Learn more about our consultants on [this page](#).

*\* The term intersectionality, created by Black feminist and scholar, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, describes how multiple oppressions can collide to create additional challenges for an individual navigating our society.*

*\*\* A framework of concepts, movement-building and terminology that seeks to address inequities. Working within a social justice framework is defined by a major push toward affirming, uplifting, and advancing people who experience the most suffering and who are excluded from full participation in society. Social justice is contextual to each society. In Canada, social justice centres the experiences of: Indigenous people, Black people, People of Colour, D/deaf people, persons with disabilities, poor and working class people, 2SLGBTQ+ (Two spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Pansexual, Non-Binary, and Genderqueer).*

## **The Process**

We began initial conversations in August 2020 and received the final report in May 2021. Although the process has taken many months, we felt that this was the right approach for our organization. We were able to take our time, be thoughtful, be thorough, and ensure that all elements of our operations were accounted for.

### **October/November:**

The consulting team met with the staff, the board and various community members to carry out consultations in one-on-one meetings. Ten stakeholders took part in the community conversations, and each was paid a small honorarium of \$75 for an hour interview.

### **November/December:**

We designed and disseminated a survey in the community. The staff were involved in creating the survey and helping to distribute to Fringe's stakeholders and mailing list. In total we received 257 responses, 69 of those from BIPOC respondents. A focus group session attended by the Fringe's Artist Advisory Committee was held by the consulting team.

### **January:**

During the 2021 Next Stage Community Booster, the team presented a public preliminary presentation of their findings – a recording of which is available [here](#). This was followed by a closed focus group open to any BIPOC folks who attended the presentation and desired a more private debrief.

### **March:**

Toronto Fringe received a draft report and held a meeting with staff and board members to discuss and ask clarifying questions of the consultants.

### **May:**

Final report delivered on May 5.

The full report was read by all Toronto Fringe staff and board, and an action plan with timelines is in process. In addition, the recommendations will be infused into the organization's next strategic plan, which will be created in September 2021.

## **June:**

This summary report was created and posted on our website.

## **Questions We Posed**

*Questions were posed to the staff, the board, the advisory group and the individuals who participated, including:*

- When you imagine the Fringe in 5 years, how do you see equity-seeking groups being involved and what do you think it would take to get there?
- What are the opportunities for equity-seeking groups at the Toronto Fringe right now, for both artists and audiences?
- What is working really well for equity-seeking groups right now?
- What are some of the challenges facing equity-seeking groups to participate in the Fringe?
- If you were on staff, were you supported well in your position by both the administrative and managerial structures?
- If you were on staff, were you compensated fairly for your work?
- Are there ways you think leadership at Fringe might think differently about diversity and representation?
- Are there considerations/barriers you think Toronto Fringe should be thinking about when it comes to the diversity of its artists?

## **Future Directions**

Within the audit, the summaries of these responses are grouped under the title of Future Directions for each group. Here are some common themes and key recommendations that were received, grouped under titles of Artists, Audience, Staff/Board/Volunteers and Outreach/Marketing:

### **ARTISTS:**

- Create safer, more welcoming spaces for BIPOC participants
- Specifically highlight BIPOC work in the festivals
- Expand equity-seeking group representation in the selection of performances
- Identify and find non-White collaborators for festival artists, especially in communities where there isn't support for theatre
- Create opportunities and resources for under-represented artists to create their work
- Remove more financial barriers/fees to the platform of the Fringe to artists in all categories
- Connect artists with donors
- Revamp lottery system

- Offer financial support for artists and have accessibility needs be built in Fringe's operating budget from the very beginning, so that the onus is not on artists/indie producers
- Consider new categories where the Fringe fees would be covered by a grant
- Offer the same nightly show times to producing companies so festival artists can schedule work, or child care
- Elevate shows from marginalized communities when selected
- Offer artists the ability to set-up a table at the Fringe patio to bring awareness to their work

### **AUDIENCE:**

- Help BIPOC audience members better navigate the festivals to find work that reflects their communities
- Consider different ways of presenting work, such as Zoom theatre or a choice of pay scale, to help remove systemic barriers
- Offer more ticket bundle options for audiences, with a possibility for dynamic pricing

### **STAFF/BOARD/VOLUNTEERS:**

- Have more representation of equity-seeking groups on staff
- Create more mentorship opportunities for BIPOC emerging leaders: paid internships, grants for job shadowing, etc.
- Offer sustainable employment and year-round opportunities
- Ensure the organization has a diverse slate of board directors and staff members
- Implement process of restorative justice to address harm to volunteers, staff, contractors
- Review front of house procedures
- Pipeline volunteers into leadership roles

### **OUTREACH/MARKETING:**

- Ensure equity-seeking groups are aware of the opportunities to participate in the Fringe
- Build deeper relationships with other service/cultural organizations
- Have a community outreach position or department where the role is long-term and that individual can build up trust and community ties – ideally this position does not turn over every year in order to maintain continuity and institutional knowledge
- Have clearer understanding of repercussions for community violations
- Outreach to be done beyond Toronto to areas like Scarborough, Brampton, Peel
- Offer more Fringe Town Halls
- Access new communities with programming that they are interested in, and then create multiple accessible entry points
- Offer more year-round engagement with equity-seeking communities beyond the artist community
- Offer clarity in processes and creation of transparent systems
- Create spaces to talk freely without White gaze
- Offer anonymous comment box or email

- Have Fringe ambassadors go into underrepresented communities to talk about the Fringe

## **Final Sessions – Winter 2021**

Our EDI consultants facilitated a Zoom conversation after the presentation of preliminary audit results in January 2021, and followed this up by a session in February 2021 specific to BIPOC folks. We used Menti, an online tool, to collect the anonymous data.

Many participants commented on capacity and resources as well as process and relationship- building that happened throughout the year. Other comments focused on the removal of financial barriers, mentorship, and leadership pipelines.

We also offered the chance for people to picture the ideal future of the Fringe: What does that look like and feel like? What images and words come to mind? Here are some of the collected answers:

- Fringe should be warm, in-person, hopeful, safe
- Fringe should feel like you are joining a family that will always be there for you
- Fringe can be a model for best practices, genuine support for artists, community, belonging, equity, learning about artists
- Fringe must focus on representation/diversity
- Fringe can offer mentorship/training for new staff
- Fringe should be a space where all feel they can obtain nourishment for the soul
- Fringe can create more intimate connection points between staff and artists (including and especially BIPOC artists)
- Fringe could remove entrance fees
- Fringe should create clear mentorship structure/resources available internally and externally to artist community
- Fringe can help artists prepare for White Fragility
- Fringe can create support and categories for older emerging artists because BIPOC artists might have a slower start and youth-oriented opportunities are not available to them

## **Final Audit Recommendations**

1. Orient to Social Justice/Culturally Responsive Programming
2. Build Capacity & Resources
3. Understandable, Transparent, Accessible, Manageable Processes

### **1. Orient to Social Justice/Culturally Responsive Programming**

- Mission, Vision, Mandate, and strategic plan needs to reflect values that embrace social justice, meaningful inclusion, and leadership of historically under-represented groups. They must recognize inequities in the distribution of resources, wealth, opportunities. There cannot be a one size fits all approach.
- All programming and decision-making must reflect this new vision that is oriented toward social justice and culturally responsive programming.

#### Questions and ideas to explore:

- How can this new vision be reflected in the strategic plan?
- Can the understanding of access be broadened?
- Might there be more space to reflect more on what financial access means to communities who are underserved and do not have traditional pathways?
- Centering social justice and culturally responsive programming will result in the Toronto Fringe better representing Toronto's demographics, as well as the Toronto Fringe truly being a platform for all artists
- Reflect a social justice vision and mission in the values. Values are currently access, accountability, support, creativity, exploration. Some pathways already exist but could there be room for more structural supports like mentorship for example. Access might mean external supports too.

## **2. Build Capacity & Resources**

- Significantly increase resources (and/or streamline current programming), both financial and human resources, to address historical inequities
- Provide ongoing training and resources in social justice for all staff, board, contract employees, artists and the wider community:
  - Focus is on creating a culture of EDI together with the orientation toward social justice/culturally-responsive and diverse programming
  - Provide funding for staff to take courses and attend workshops on social justice issues
  - Invite workshop facilitators and/or attend workshops on social justice as a staff and board
  - Share social justice articles and themes on social media and in newsletters, create time within staff and board meetings to share learnings and insights
  - Ensure every contract staff member receives training and clear communication around Fringe's policies
- Transform the part-time Outreach Coordinator outreach position into a full-time position, including an all-year work plan to include relationship-building
- Hire and train people in both permanent and contract positions from historically marginalized groups and create programs like mentoring, job shadowing, making a target to hire from a marginalized group when current staff leave their positions, etc.



- Build relationships with historically marginalized groups all year round, with an emphasis on:
  - Reaching out, making strategic alliances and initiatives with artists and organizations in Toronto's inner suburbs where BIPOC communities live and make art in larger numbers
  - Continuing relationships with urban Indigenous and local Indigenous nations, including current relationship with Centre for Indigenous Theatre (e.g Six Nations, Mississaugas of the Credit River, Curve Lake and more)
  - Continuing to engage with artists with disabilities and Deaf artists and hiring them for both permanent and contract positions and supporting them to produce their work in the festival
  - Continuing to build relationships with previously contracted BIPOC artists, volunteers and arts workers
  - Continuing to liaise on a regular basis with media outlets from under represented communities
  - Supporting increased artist capacity to produce work in the Fringe
  - Removing the application fee to enter the lottery
  - Removing the \$760 fee for the summer festival
  - Providing mentorship, training and resources for all Fringe artists on how to produce
  - Providing mentorship, training and guidance on fundraising and grant writing all year round so artists are well resourced for their productions
  - Connecting artists to funders, donors and resources to fund their productions

### **3. Understandable, Transparent, Accessible, Manageable Processes**

Communicate a clear, transparent, accessible, widely-advertised process for hiring contract staff, with an emphasis on hiring those from under-represented groups. Go about the hiring process in different ways in terms of where and how Fringe advertises. Does the hiring committee reflect the diversity we are seeking? Will questions about equity be asked and used to vet candidates?

- Communicate robust, clear and transparent policies and processes that are widely communicated to every person who interacts with the Fringe around harassment and bullying. Go beyond a statement on the website to providing clear and large signage at all venues, communicating the policy to all artists and other methods to communicate the policy
- Ensure that all staff (including temporary staff) and artists are aware that harassment can also include racism, ableism, homophobia, etc, in addition to sexual harassment
- Create an understandable and manageable process around addressing conflict and issues that arise among permanent and contract staff, artists, volunteers and board including providing external supports to those who have experienced harm and a budget for mediation and/or transformative justice
- Commit to transparency around the curation of Next Stage and any awards, including communication of the members of the juries and decision criteria

- Continue to embed goal-setting and evaluation in every program and process and a process for sharing those evaluations with the wider community.

Examples include:

- Exit surveys and other debrief methods for all contract staff
- Collecting more data from Fringe artists, including exit surveys and other debrief methods
- Continue the process of voluntary data collection on the demographics of the staff, board, volunteers, contract staff and artists. This should be a regular practise to measure goals in the context of EDI.