

TORONTO
FRINGE

ANNUAL REPORT 2019



MISSION:

The Toronto Fringe is a platform for everyone to access, discover, and experiment with the arts. By valuing creative experiences, we contribute to a healthy arts economy and, ultimately, a thriving society.

VALUES:

ACCESS – in every sense of the word

ACCOUNTABILITY – we work with integrity and respect

CREATIVITY – freedom of expression permeates everything we do

EXPLORATION - we let curiosity be our guide

SUPPORT – empowering you to take a chance

KEY ASPECTS OF VALUES

When we talk about access we mean physical access to our spaces, we mean financial access by maintaining affordable prices to all events, and we mean that the festival is accessible to patrons and artists alike.

The team behind the Fringe works hard to ensure that we are always prioritizing our artists and that they are the driving force behind everything we do. We have brainstorming sessions regularly so we can constantly create and explore new ideas to move the organization forward. We empower our audience, our artists, our staff, our volunteers, and all our stakeholders to take a chance on actively participating in this festival.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Toronto Fringe is a non-profit charitable organization that was founded in 1989. Our fiscal year runs from September 1st – August 31st.

Our Board of Directors is currently made up of nine members, with expertise across a number of disciplines. We plan to expand and further diversify the composition of the Board in the coming year.

We are now entering Year Two of our current Strategic Plan, which you can access online. We have already completed one of our four main goals. These goals are:

1. A Welcoming, Accessible, Multi-Purpose Space

We have now moved into a new, accessible space in Toronto's east end, in the Riverside neighbourhood. We have signed a 5-year lease and are very happy to be in this space, so this goal is considered complete.

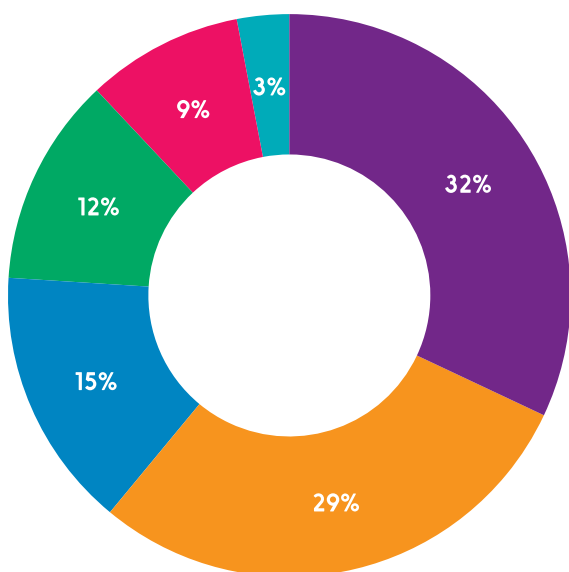
2. A Highly Resourced Operation with Robust Revenue Streams
3. Increased Awareness, Participation and Representation
4. Expanded Industry Partnerships and Ongoing Artistic Development

FINANCIAL POSITION

The Fringe generated over \$2 million in revenue this year, with over 0.5 million attributed to the box office revenue, paid directly to artists. Remaining revenues covered expenses (see below for further details).

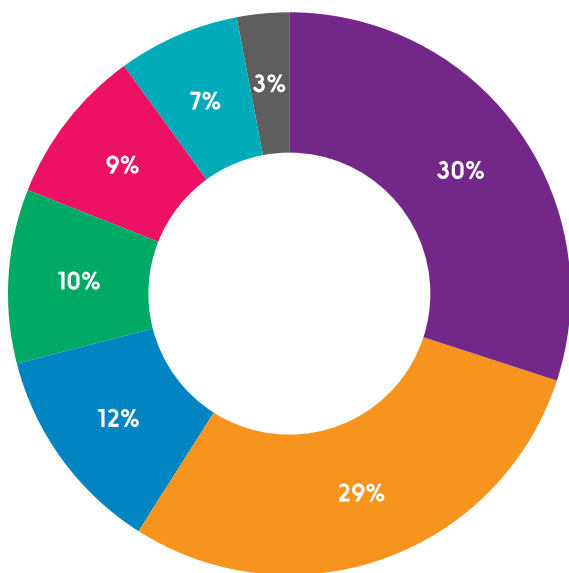
We also engage approximately 400 volunteers over the course of the year to work with us for Next Stage and Fringe and we could not operate our organization without the commitment of these dedicated people.

We have partners that provide in-kind contributions, such as Fresh Gift Cards for the volunteers, Steam Whistle brewery tours, and other businesses offering vouchers and discounts to share with our artists.



OVERALL REVENUE BREAKDOWN 2018-2019

- Box Office Revenue – paid to artists
- Government Grants
- Sponsorship & Fundraising
- Earned revenue (patio sales, participation fees)
- Box office fees
- Marketing income (ad sales)



OVERALL EXPENSES BREAKDOWN 2018-2019

- Box Office and Artist Fees
- Personnel (Full Time and Festival-specific)
- Administration
- POSTSCRIPT Patio costs
- Marketing & Advertising (i.e. TTC, Radio, Print & Social Media costs)
- Technical Costs
- Outreach and Community Partnership Costs (i.e. T.E.N.T. Program, Teen Fringe, etc.)

SEPTEMBER 1 – AUGUST 31, 2019

HIGHLIGHTS

- Highest-ever selling Toronto Fringe Festival, including the highest revenue for KidsFest in its history, despite reducing intake in this category by one company (seven companies instead of eight).
- Continued to build the brand of the Toronto Fringe, including the summer Fringe Festival and Next Stage Theatre Festival, as well as POSTSCRIPT, our patio, seeing record numbers of attendees throughout the 12 days.
- Showcased Crow's Theatre spaces at Streetcar Crowsnest as new venues for Toronto Fringe Festival.
- Sent out a survey discussing ideas for Next Stage Festival, which were used to inform decisions for the 2020 festival.
- Welcomed our new Development Manager, Morgan Norwich, welcomed back Claire Wynveen to the Communications Manager role, and welcomed Tessa Cernik into the new full-time role of Projects & Operations Manager, bringing the number of year-round full-time management staff up to five people (we had previously been a team of four).
- Secured new or increased sponsorships and partnerships with Communauto, Slight Music, and KM Hunter Foundation.
- Continued sponsorships and partnerships with Steam Whistle, Nickel9 Distillery, Waterloo Brewing, and many others, ensuring there was space within each partnership for activations and creative exchanges.
- Successfully secured funding for a Metcalf Internship and hired Julia Vodarek Hunter as our Festival Management Intern from February 2019 to February 2020.
- We created a new #StartedAtTheFringe video featuring playwright and creator of *Kim's Convenience*, Ins Choi to distribute as part of our messaging around the power of the Fringe movement.

CHALLENGES

- After a fruitful partnership with an organization that sponsored part of the 2018 Fringe Festival, we had earmarked potential sponsorship dollars from them for our 2019 programming. Unfortunately, the organization could not return as a 2019 sponsor, which resulted in us trying to make up a \$70,000 deficit in our annual budget.
- The outdoor swimming pool at Scadding Court adjacent to POSTSCRIPT was closed for construction during the 12 days of the Toronto Fringe Festival, which may have affected bar sales.
- Bar sales were slightly less than 2018. It is possible that the legalisation of cannabis may have had an effect on our sales. We did see an increase in our food sales at the patio.
- While our move to a new and accessible office space in the east end of Toronto at the end of our fiscal year was great for the organization, the move was labour intensive and costly. It was also a challenge to simultaneously run the organization over the moving period.
- Overall, we ended the year with a deficit of close to \$25,000.

THE FULL YEAR THROUGH THE LENS OF OUR FIVE VALUES:

ACCESS

In every sense of the word

- We upheld this value by entering into Year Two of our funded Accessibility Project with the Metcalf Foundation. We retained our Accessibility Manager for this work. Because we had a surplus from Year One, we were able to do even more work in this area for Year Two.
- We shifted our accessibility messaging to better reflect our commitment to independence and dignity for patrons with accessibility needs.
- We doubled the amount of Assisted Performances (ASL and Deaf interpreted, Audio Described, and Relaxed)
 - Next Stage: three companies offered four ASL interpreted shows, one offered a closed Audio Described show, one offered all shows open Audio Described, one Relaxed Performance was offered by one company, and all shows were offered as Relaxed Performances by another company
 - Toronto Fringe Festival: 85 individual assisted performances were offered by 36 companies
- At Next Stage, we supplied large print and Braille house programs for patrons and programmed work by a Blind artist.
- We audited all of our main venues to assess and address barriers to physical access, and created documents to relay comprehensive accessibility information to our audiences.
- We made modifications to POSTSCRIPT to improve physical accessibility, to make it more welcoming to the Deaf community, and more appealing to people with neurodiversity, including partnering with Tangled Arts, a disability-led organization, to program Deaf and disability-identified artists on the POSTSCRIPT stage.
- We created a text-reader friendly downloadable Assisted Performances Supplement for the Fringe Program Guide.
- We overhauled the box office experience to significantly improve the accessibility measures we offer our ticket-buying patrons and improved accessibility training for staff and volunteers.
- We increased our signed video library information on our website.
- We moved our office from Richmond Street West to an accessible building in the East End of Toronto at Broadview and Queen.
- We continue to offer opportunities to connect with anyone in the team, via email, phone, or in person should you have any questions, concerns or feedback.
- We uploaded all of our participant-aimed seminars on our Facebook page so that people could access information whenever they needed to.

ACCOUNTABILITY

We work with integrity and respect

- Accountability requires transparency, and we are focusing on transparency for everything we do.
- We send sponsorship fulfillment reports to all of our partners after each festival, in order to let our stakeholders know who we are, what we do, and why we make the decisions we make.
- Our Strategic Plan and our Accessibility Manifesto are available to the public on our website, keeping us accountable to the work we are doing.
- We offer easy ways for people to offer feedback through online forms, emails, or by calling us directly.
- Our Executive Director is the President of CAFF (Canadian Association of Fringe Festivals) which ensures we are accountable to the overall mandate of CAFF and have a role in developing that organization, which in turn is accountable to all member festivals and their artists.

CREATIVITY

Freedom of expression permeates everything we do

- We make time once a week (when not in the immediate lead up to a festival) to have a “blue skies” brainstorming session with all staff. This can be for solving small problems or big ideas to collaborate on.
- We are continuing our work with Sheridan College and their Creative Humanities Program to develop the T.E.N.T. (Theatre Entrepreneurs Network and Training) Program.

EXPLORATION

We let curiosity be our guide

- We are focusing on tracking and understanding our data to help us make better informed decisions for our festivals and programs.
- We are working with the RBC Career Launch program for the second year, which pairs us with a business graduate who works with our organization to consolidate and analyze our data, including sales patterns, customer trends, and artist demographics.
- We have also implemented Slack and Asana for better project management and collaboration as well as have recently shifted to the Office 365 suite to ensure a practical system for our internal infrastructure.

SUPPORT

Empowering you to take a chance

- We worked with the WeeFestival to support all their box office needs and are actively looking for other opportunities to host the box office system for other festivals and/or shows.
- We provide equipment rentals for many organizations in the city looking for technical equipment, chairs, stools, box office equipment, and more.
- We are highly dedicated to supporting our peer Fringe Festivals nationally and internationally. An example of this would be our recent support of the Hamilton Fringe Festival, where we worked closely with them to achieve their goals this past calendar year.

GOALS FOR 2019-2020 AND BEYOND

Marketing:

- We plan on moving away from tourism-focused marketing, instead focusing on Toronto and the GTA to increase our audience to both festivals and to POSTSCRIPT. We have seen from our data collection that bringing patrons to the patio increases overall attendance to the festival.

Community Partnerships and Outreach:

- We plan to look more closely at our various outreach initiatives and see where we can grow and where to adapt. We will specifically be looking at the Teenjur Program, Teen Fringe Program, Neville's Next Gen Night and T.E.N.T.
- We plan to host small workshops in our office space which will serve as both community building and an additional revenue stream.
- We identified Blind and low-vision audiences as particularly underserved and plan on implementing programs to reduce barriers and encourage engagement from those groups.
- We are creating a community-led Access Committee to inform and support our accessibility work.

Funding:

- We are researching Canada Council Project Grants and the Trillium Grow Grant as possibilities for new sources of funding for the organization.
- As government funding becomes more precarious, we are looking to develop more partnerships with foundations and corporations, and increase our individual donor base.
- We will be hosting a focus group with some of our key donors as part of our work with Sheridan to explore how to increase the funding for our T.E.N.T. Program.
- As mentioned above, we are developing our equipment and space rentals service to create more stable revenue sources.
- We want to continue the accessibility work we have started under the Metcalf Creative Strategies Incubator funding for the years to come as we strive to make the organization even more accessible.

- We want to create more revenue so we can increase our fees to core and seasonal staff, to see more staff retention year to year and greater succession planning.

Changes:

- We updated the structure of the Next Stage Festival, removing the Antechamber as a venue to allow for better scheduling and overall showtimes, and to allow time in the schedule for Talkbacks and Q & A sessions.
- We changed the timing of the 24 Hour Playwriting Contest to allow for the winner to have a reading during Next Stage and then a full presentation at the 2020 Toronto Fringe Festival.
- We are working with StagePage, an organization devoted to analyzing audience data, with the goal of increasing our audience base to have a better understanding of who our audience is, allowing us to provide a better experience for those stakeholders.
- We plan to implement a new ticketing app, piloting it at Next Stage 2020, giving customers even more accessible and customizable ways to pay for theatre.
- We are working with a new company, Creative Earth, to thoroughly audit the greening initiatives within our organization and to implement eco-friendlier policies.
- We are focused on developing our relationships with Indigenous communities in Toronto and the GTA in authentic ways and have begun a partnership with the Centre for Indigenous Training.
- We will not be using the Randolph or Annex Theatres, at their request, for the 2020 Toronto Fringe Festival. We are instead partnering with Native Earth Performing Arts to bring the festival to Aki Studio.
- To investigate improving box office sales, we will reduce the size of the festival by 8 companies. We believe this decrease in main venues will mean more individual sales for shows across the board.

CONCLUSION

The Toronto Fringe remains approachable and open to feedback. Artists, patrons, donors, and the general public are encouraged to reach out to the staff directly at general@fringetoronto.com, or use the form on our website.

We look forward to our years ahead as the Fringe becomes even more prominent in Toronto and worldwide. Along with our CAFF membership we are also proud members of the World Fringe Network which connects us with Fringes everywhere. Our Executive Director will be attending the upcoming congress for World Fringe in February in Adelaide, Australia.

We welcome and encourage new donors to come forward to support us in achieving the goals described in this report.







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