

# STRATEGIC PLAN: 2018–2021

## Updated December 2019

### ABOUT THE TORONTO FRINGE

The Toronto Fringe presented its first festival in the summer of 1989. Over the past 31 years, it has grown into Ontario's largest theatre festival, welcoming over 80,000 patrons and giving a voice to over 1,200 artists annually. The Fringe has premiered some of Canada's most successful theatre productions including *'Da Kink In My Hair* and *The Drowsy Chaperone*. *Kim's Convenience* by Ins Choi won the 2011 New Play Contest and has since been adapted into a television sitcom on CBC. The festival has expanded to include the KidsFest Festival and over 20 site specific performances. POSTSCRIPT, the Fringe's festival hub was rebranded and redesigned in 2018, and for the 12 days of the festival is Toronto's largest pop-up patio in the hockey rink by Scadding Court Community Centre, featuring a full bar and free entertainment.

The Next Stage Theatre Festival celebrated its 12th anniversary in 2019. Next Stage is a curated festival that runs annually each January, featuring 10-12 productions with no application fee, and returns 70% of the ticket price to the artists. The festival's mandate is to provide a platform for successful indie artists and companies from Fringes or beyond to take their work to the next level.

In 2011 the Fringe opened the Creation Lab at 720 Bathurst Street. It offered two fully equipped creation spaces for community rental at heavily subsidized rates. Due to rental rate increases, the Fringe was forced to close the Lab in August 2015.

The Fringe currently operates with a full-time staff of five, plus 150 seasonal staff throughout the year to support both festivals. There are approximately 500 active volunteers and a Board of Directors consisting of up to 12 representatives.

### 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

### ORGANIZATIONAL VISION

The Toronto Fringe identified the following as what we want to see in place by 2021. These elements for our organizational vision frame the goals articulated below.

- A welcoming, accessible, multi-purpose space
- A sustainable highly resourced operation
- Increased brand awareness and participation
- Ambitious and robust revenue streams
- Increased accessibility and broader representation
- Ongoing artistic development
- Expanded industry partnerships

## STRATEGIC PLAN

In our current strategic plan, we developed 4 goals to focus on over the next three years and beyond. Each goal is accompanied by a working plan involving the Fringe staff and board, with action items broken out into Year 1 (2018-2019), Year 2 (2019-2020), and Year 3 (2020-2021).

### GOAL 1: A WELCOMING, ACCESSIBLE, MULTI-PURPOSE SPACE

The Creation Lab that the Fringe operated from 2011 to 2015 provided much-needed affordable workshop and rehearsal space for the sector, and was conveniently located next to the organization's offices, located at that time at 720 Bathurst Street. The lease on the organization's administrative space at 688 Richmond Street West expired in 2019.

The board and staff view the re-establishment of such a multi-purpose working space as a priority, which will help to achieve other vision elements such as expanded industry partnerships and ongoing artistic development. While recognizing Toronto's tight and expensive real estate market, further internal discussions will clarify both "what" they need, and "how" to proceed.

#### Updates heading into Year 2:

In August 2019, the Toronto Fringe moved our administrative office across the city to 100 Broadview Avenue, at Queen and Broadview and committed to a 5-year lease. The new building is fully physically accessible (a major priority for us when looking at space), and includes a small meeting room.

At the start of our search for new office space in the fall of 2018, we sought community feedback and determined that an affordable studio space (i.e. a new Creation Lab space) was no longer a priority for our organization. We also determined with the help of our board and real estate agent that finding accessible space big enough to hold our office and a large studio space in the downtown core that was both close to transit and within our price range was not possible at this time. Our small meeting room is available to rent at reasonable rates on evenings and weekends as of November 2019.

**As of Fall 2019, Goal 1 has been completed.**

### GOAL 2: A HIGHLY RESOURCED OPERATION WITH ROBUST REVENUE STREAMS

The Fringe is a lean operation, with only four full time staff and a budget of approximately \$1.6M. There has been a smooth transition to new management in the current year, yet staff have to juggle the many existing priorities leaving scant time for multi-year planning or new initiatives and partnerships. The Fringe is reliant on a mix of government, earned and contributed revenue with a potential for growth in the latter segment.

#### Updates heading into Year 2:

In January 2019, the new position of Projects & Operations Manager was created to round out the Fringe's full time staff from 4 to 5 positions and more evenly distributing the year-round work of the organization. We have also transitioned our email and file sharing platform to Microsoft 365, taking advantage of their free non-profit package and making our day-to-day operations easier and more mobile, particularly for contract staff who work remotely.

We are working on more concrete ways to determine the Fringe's impact on the Toronto arts community, with the goal to better understand how vital the Fringe is to indie theatre and better communicate this vitality to potential donors, sponsors, and partners. After completing a large scale data analysis in Fall 2018 and Fall 2019 of our ticket sales and audience and artist demographics from recent years, we have a better sense of our position as an organization and are able to gauge our standing in the wider arts community of Toronto and Canada. The Toronto Fringe sells many tickets to a wide demographic, but we believe if we can increase our marketing budget, we can increase our audience. Comparing ourselves with other arts organizations of our size will identify what we are doing well, where we can grow, and how we can plan for financial sustainability and contingency in the coming years.

### **GOAL 3: INCREASE AWARENESS, PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION**

The Fringe attracts approximately 70,000 patrons to the summer festival and a further 10,000 to Next Stage and offers programs targeted to children and youth. Achieving increased diversity among artists and performers has been a long-standing priority for the Fringe, which led to the creation of a lottery specifically dedicated to diverse applicants and applicants with accessible needs. There is a strong organizational desire to identify and to reach out to a broader audience.

The Fringe is also rebranding the Fringe Club to a Fringe Patio as a way to reach out and attract tourists and to make this hub more accessible to a wider audience, who may use this as an entryway into the Festival.

The Fringe is in the first year of developing an Accessibility Plan, funded by the Metcalf Foundation. The goal of this plan is to broaden accessibility both within the organization and with the artists with whom the Fringe works. One outcome will be a handbook that guides participating companies towards creating more accessible plays.

#### **Updates heading in to Year 2:**

Out of the data analysis we have undertaken recently (see Goal 2), we have learned that we had our highest ever ticket sales at Fringe 2019, demonstrating our success at increasing awareness of Fringe to the general public and arts-going community. Conclusions from this data analysis will continue to inform our marketing and development plans for Next Stage 2020 and Fringe 2020 and beyond, and we predict we will continue to see increases in tickets sales for both festivals.

The Fringe is also committed to seeing more diversity in our artists, in the applications to both festivals, in our staff and board, and in our patrons. To work towards this better representation and to continue building our outreach programs (like T.E.N.T., Teen Fringe, and Teenjur), we have identified the desire for adding a 6<sup>th</sup> full-time position, a Community Engagement Manager, to join the Fringe's full time team in the next few years.

In the meantime, the Fringe continues to create organization-wide culture and processes where our values drive our day-to-day decision making and long term planning. We also are working on communicating these values broadly so that they permeate everything we do, from the small things like including our values at the bottom of our letterhead to the big things like continuing to improve our accessibility and access measures at our festivals.

### **GOAL 4: EXPANDED INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS AND ONGOING ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT**

The Fringe has established various partnerships over the years (with organizations such as Second City, and the Toronto Centre for the Arts for the Best of Fringe) and is interested in finding other partners to work with to benefit both the artists and the Fringe. Through research, prospecting, and development, the Fringe will formalize partnerships with organizations in the cultural sector and beyond in order to create opportunities for artists to continue with their artistic development. Existing partnerships will be strengthened and revitalized, and new partnerships will be explored.

Since the Fringe is, for many artists, the first introduction to the theatre community in Toronto, it is in a position to provide artists with ways to continue on their paths of development beyond the two festivals. Year-round programming for artists will allow for this continued development, and could include workshop series, in-house incubation and support throughout the creative process, and hotdesks. Through this goal the Fringe will strengthen and enhance current artist development programs such as the T.E.N.T. Program and the Teen Fringe Program.

#### **Updates heading into Year 2:**

We are understanding more and more how the Toronto Fringe acts as a feeder system for artists into the Toronto (and Canadian) performance community. We are working towards building comprehensive databases of artists, staff, volunteers, and partners to keep track of who has moved through our organization and what they have gone on to achieve, as well as maintaining connections with them into the future. We

have begun to highlight success stories that have sprung out of the Toronto Fringe with our series of #StartedAtTheFringe videos, featuring Trey Anthony and, more recently, Ins Choi. We believe creating dynamic ways for people to see how the Fringe breaks down barriers for emerging artists is crucial in encouraging artists, audience members, and donors to invest their time and money in this organization.

Through the creation and maintenance of this network of past-Fringers, we hope to create more development opportunities for our artists and past participants, deepening our engagement with the Toronto artistic community. We have partnered with Sheridan College to develop the T.E.N.T. (Theatre Entrepreneurs Networking Training) program and create an active T.E.N.T. alumni community.

The majority of action points for this goal will be achieved in Year 3, with the research and preparation taking place now in Year 2.