

TORONTO FRINGE STRATEGIC PLAN: 2018–2020

The Toronto Fringe (the Fringe) presented its first festival in the summer of 1989. Over the past 29 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 Fringe 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.

The Next Stage Theatre Festival celebrated its 11th anniversary in 2018. Next Stage is a curated festival that runs annually each January, featuring 10 productions pulled from top Fringe companies, 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 Fringe artists and companies to take their work to the next level.

In 2011 the Fringe opened a 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 four, plus 150 seasonal staff during the 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.

ORGANIZATIONAL VISION

The Toronto Fringe has identified the following as what they want to see in place by 2021. These elements of their organizational vision frame the goals articulated later in this Strategic Plan.

- 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

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

In this 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.

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. The lease on the organization's current administrative space expires in 2019.

The Board and staff view the re-establishment of such a 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.

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.

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.

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.