

# The Eastern Front Theatre Accessibility Project Report

*The Art of Respecting One Another*

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An examination of the barriers faced by underrepresented performing artists across Nova Scotia. This report suggests ways all members at every level of the arts community can work toward creating a more accessible and inclusive industry.

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# Introduction

My name is April Hubbard, and I was hired to lead the Accessibility Project in early 2021. As a Queer, Disabled, Mad woman of mixed Acadian, Mi'kmaw and settler descent, living and working in K'jipuktuk, (Halifax), my artist identity was erased overnight when I began using mobility aids in my early twenties. A mentor made their beliefs clear when they told me I could no longer be an actor because my limp would be too distracting to the audience. After waiting a decade to be hired for another acting role, I realized that to maintain some connection to the performing arts, I would need to get creative! I turned to production, direction, and accessibility advisement to have a place in the community I loved, but never felt fulfilled making art for everyone else. In 2018, I discovered adaptive circus and found my home. My return to the stage allowed me to reconnect with the many underrepresented artists who, like me, were struggling against the many attitudinal, structural, and systemic barriers to creating the art they love.

While still in the interview process, I made it clear that the scope of the project was too narrow - it shifted to explore the barriers faced by all underrepresented performing artists and audiences in Nova Scotia. I decided that we should begin by speaking with members of the IBPOC, 2SLGBTQIA+, newcomers to Canada, invisibly or visibly Disabled, d/Deaf or hard of hearing, blind or partially sighted, Neurodivergent, and Mad communities. We also considered how gender, race, ethnic and cultural identity shape individual experience.

The first step in the Eastern Front Theatre (EFT) Accessibility Project was to select team members. I knew I needed to prioritize those with lived experience who were already doing the work, so I reached out to community organizations and connections for advice on who they felt I should be listening to. After compiling a long list, a few names rose to the top. My team was made up of:

Nat Chantel

Carmen Lee

Leelee Oluwatoyosi Eko Davis

Maeghan Taverner

Kirsten Taylor

Raymond Sewell

Initial team conversations made it clear that we wanted to work within an anti-oppressive, anti-racist, anti-capitalist, anti-colonial scope and with a Disability Justice lens throughout the project. This meant that we would prioritize the voices of those with lived experience, respect intersections of identity, and adapt

the project to the needs of each participant. We took time to explore the concept that we are all working from our own histories, being raised under capitalist and colonial systems and this will shape our leadership of the project. We gave voice to our goal of working together to minimize the effect any one person's experience has on the end results.

Throughout our process, we conducted research to discover what information was already available, interviewed arts organizations, held paid community consultation with underrepresented artists, held sidewalk chats where we asked random community members to talk about their relationship to the performing arts, and finally conducted an online survey to gather objective criteria, which can be used to measure progress as we move forward in this process over time.

Early on, the team decided to focus on possibilities for the future rather than fixating on problems we discovered. I will strive to shape this report in a way that highlights our hopes, while acknowledging the barriers that exist in today's system. As you read through, recognize that I am not calling you out, but rather calling you in to join the amazing community who are already building their arts utopia right here in Nova Scotia!

This project has been a labor of love for me, but it has also been incredibly emotionally taxing for our team. I recognize my privilege in having a voice as an underrepresented artist, and to be deemed deserving of a voice. I recognize that this privilege only exists because I am a white, cisgendered woman, with a disability that can be disguised by sitting behind a desk, who is typically assumed to be straight. But this privilege also comes with pressure. I feel a responsibility to amplify the voices of everyone in my community who are not permitted to speak for themselves, while trying to find a way to open doors so they can self-advocate.

This year I sat on more than twenty boards and advisory committees, spoke on more than forty-five panels, podcasts and in Q&As that addressed the question, "why do people like you deserve to have a place at the arts table"? In the midst of this advocacy work, I had to search for strength to lead our team, who were for the first-time witnessing the full extent of our community's trauma. There were many days when I reached my breaking point. During one of these moments when my body had shut down after pushing too far, a friend suggested I take the

day off and rest. In that moment I realized if I stop to rest there is nobody left to speak up. If I stop fighting, even for a day, there will be countless other artists who will not get to create. I share this story to illustrate that this report cannot be in vain! You cannot read it and let it sit on a shelf with all the others that came before. I know my life in arts accessibility is quickly ending as I draw closer to burnout. I am asking all of you to step in and help me in this fight. Please don't make me spend another hour explaining to a room full of people why we deserve our human rights!

## **Supporters**

The Eastern Front Theatre Accessibility Project team offers their sincere thanks to our supporters who shared their time, knowledge, community connections and who provided financial support:

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Page 1 Theatre  
Prismatic Arts Festival  
Probably Theatre Collective

Ship's Company Theatre  
The Villains Theatre  
The Woods Hip Hop Company  
Theatre Baddeck  
Theatre Nova Scotia  
Two Planks and a Passion Theatre  
Votive Dance

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## Challenges Faced

**Covid isolation** meant that our team could not gather in person which made it difficult to feel like we were working toward a cohesive goal and to provide the mutual aid team members needed. This slowed down the interview process, as we had to speak to participants online and in small groups. Some organizations and people we wanted to speak to were spread too thin to give us their time and attention.

**Connecting through Zoom** added an extra layer of difficulty in allowing the participants to feel safe enough to be open and share honestly and fully. Once they saw that our team was made up of underrepresented artists facing similar challenges, they soon opened up and offered their ideas.

**Life events delaying work** - As underrepresented artists we are more likely to have unexpected events take place that will affect the expected timeline. Some of this may be due to factors caused by illness and the integrated level of care work within our communities, while other delays come because of the system ignoring our needs. The team at Eastern Front Theatre was wonderful at adjusting our timeline and trusting that we were doing everything in our power to meet the goal.

**Emotional trauma as team members** - The team experienced many traumas during our time working on this project. Team members lost loved ones, struggled with health concerns that led to hospitalizations, balanced lost work with leading their families through drastic Covid changes, became primary caregivers for family and friends, and worked to provide mutual aid to traumatized communities struggling with a system that criminalized homelessness and Disability. While we all worked to care for ourselves, our team members were surprised by how often community members disclosed major traumas experienced under the current Nova Scotian arts system. Again and again, artists thanked us for providing a safe place where these conversations could happen. We heard reports of verbal abuse, physical abuse, misgendering, use of slurs, systemic overworking, dangerous working conditions, sexual harassment, and sexual abuse. Nearly every underrepresented artist had an example where they were forced to choose between placing themselves in a dangerous work environment or turning down much needed work. Although we felt trusted to bear witness to these traumas, it took a much greater toll on the mental and emotional health of the team members than we had anticipated.



## Missed Goals

**Regional representation** - We had hoped to study the unique challenges faced in different regions of Nova Scotia but with Covid shutdowns it was challenging to make these community connections, so we decided this should be explored after Covid regulations have been lifted. We planned to explore the art happening in the Acadian communities of south-west Nova Scotia, communities across Cape Breton, and in the many talented Mi'kmaq communities like Bear River and Millbrook, just to name a few. There are many unique artistic styles that deserve to be recognized and documented. This would make a wonderful project for a team of underrepresented summer students to study!

**Newcomers to Canada** - Although we spoke to a small cohort of newcomers to Canada, it was difficult to separate the barriers caused by Covid from the barriers they were experiencing as newcomers. It was clear that race played a strong role in the experience of newcomers in the arts scene. Newcomers seemed to be much more welcome in the music and dance scenes than in theatre, drag or spoken word. Many newcomers expressed frustration with being offered artistic opportunities in community-building projects, but there were additional barriers when they tried to transition to become a professional artist. We must create a greater network of opportunities where an artist at any level of experience can arrive in Canada and see a path to participating and growing their career in the arts.

**Avoiding burnout** - We had various levels of success in setting boundaries and sticking to them. As the project progressed and we heard more accounts of trauma, I sometimes failed to leave the stories behind at the end of the day. I learned a great deal from my team about prioritizing self-care and asking for time away so I could return to the project after rest, fully present and committed.

**Behind the scenes players** - We realized late in this project that there were many people in the industry that we had not made the effort to reach out to. There should be more conversation with writers, composers, conductors, choreographers, DJs, stage managers, technicians, sound engineers, technical crew, costume designers, set designers, lighting and sound designers, marketing directors, public relations directors, agents, managers, publicists, promoters, arts administrators, merchandisers, graphic designers, photographers and videographers, teachers, vocal coaches, and arts journalists.

**Timeline for survey results** - We had hoped to have the survey results included in this original report but due to unexpected life circumstances our timeline was delayed. Instead, we will complete the survey and will add an overview of the findings as an appendix to this report.

**Single author on final report** - Although we worked collaboratively in gathering the information for this project and had many conversations around the important themes that arose, when it was time to write the final report our timeline had shifted so that many team members could no longer continue to the report writing phase. While I attempted to represent the thoughts and perspectives of all community consultants, I realize that my own personal biases may show through as the sole author.

## Discoveries

**Common feelings of inadequacy in underrepresented artists** - When we gathered underrepresented artists together, they discovered that they were not alone in their feelings of inadequacy, which kept them from applying for future career opportunities. They shared that the cumulative effect of being told you lack qualifications or attributes, makes it difficult to have confidence in your strengths. I will admit that it took the support and encouragement of many friends before I decided to put myself out there and apply for this project.

**More Disability awareness needed** - When we asked arts organizations if they felt equipped to make changes to become more accessible and inclusive, the majority (more than 90%) responded that they felt equipped to work toward inclusion in some areas but had no idea where to begin with the Disability community. Organizations seem to be pleading for guidance in this area.

**Mental health supports needed** - The 2018 Mental Health Survey conducted by the East Coast Music Association (ECMA) highlighted many statistics that show that there is a higher percentage of East Coast music industry members reporting mental health concerns, compared to the rest of the country. They also reported challenges accessing mental health supports and lower income. More than half of respondents to the survey said they live below the poverty line and 60% felt they had an undiagnosed mental health disorder.

Although we have not found statistics for other arts modalities in Nova Scotia, we heard similar reports from all artists.

**High percentage of hidden Disabilities** - We were all surprised by the large number of artists and technical crew working with invisible Disabilities who have no plans to disclose their Disability as they see it as a career ender. Many had specific examples of artists or crew members who disclosed their Disabilities and who are no longer working in the arts as a result.

**Strong correlation between Drag, Burlesque and Disability** - In speaking to the community, there appears to be an uncommonly high number of Drag and Burlesque artists who also identify as Disabled. These artists rarely identify openly as they already feel underappreciated and unwanted in the larger arts community so they see no benefit in sharing another identity that could be used to other them.

**Body types and style** - Many artists highlighted that a hypersexualized body of a certain standard presentation is still required to be given opportunities for advancement. If you are overweight, of average weight, visibly Disabled or IBPOC your body is deemed invalid, and you cannot advance. Artists whose gender presentation is outside the norm and those whose sexuality is not heteronormative are labeled as unmarketable. Including and welcoming artists of all body types needs to become part of the conversation!

**Language hierarchy** - There is a definite preference toward English language arts in Nova Scotia although there are so many other languages that deserve exploring through our performing arts. Many participants expressed interest in further opportunities for artistic exploration in French Acadian, Arabic, Mi'kmaq, French, Gaelic, Farsi, American Sign Language (ASL) and Maritime Sign Language (MSL). We not only need to prioritize rehearsal and performance in these languages but also prioritize exploring ways various languages can be integrated into a performance in creative ways. This requires much more study and attention. Funding is often offered as a barrier, although there are grants provided that will cover the costs. It seems to be more of a lack of motivation that keeps it from happening.

**Political and religious hierarchy** - Several conversations with community members revealed that there is a marked favouring of atheist views and left leaning politics in our current arts environments. This means that anyone who openly expresses their conservative religious or political views will likely face barriers to participation. This led to discussion around the importance of learning how to have respectful conversations where differing opinions can lead to healthy dialogue that will not complicate future working relationships.

**Effects of discrimination in our educational institutions** - In recent years stories have begun to be shared of horrific discrimination and abuse in our education institutions that led to many underrepresented artists dropping out. This was already well known to those of us in underrepresented communities but is now being brought into the mainstream. This means that many of us do not possess the needed certifications that would allow us to apply for funding and positions of power where we could make lasting change. We need to adjust the criteria which marks anyone without formal education as invalid.

**Social standing and economic disparities** - Participants brought up the fact that an individual's experience of the arts varies greatly depending on their perceived social class and economic standing. There are still assumptions made prior to hiring about a person's ability to use their connections to attract the 'right kind of audience'. Judgments are also made about the artists' ability to miss paying work to commit all their time to the project. Artists also expressed frustration that producers assume everyone has disposable income to spend up front on production costs and then be reimbursed later. This problem was greatly amplified in the IBPOC community, which stems from anti-Black, anti-Indigenous stereotypes.

**Free community art projects** - Our sidewalk chats revealed that many community members feel that art is not for them because they don't feel welcome in traditional arts spaces. There need to be more opportunities for members of the community to interact with artists outside of theatres and performance spaces. Bring free art to them in the form of pop-up sidewalk and park performances. Bring visual artists to them to create a piece of work live in front of them or invite the community to collaborate on a communal art project like a chalk mural. You never know what talented artists you may discover and the stories we heard simply by inviting people to speak with us on the street were deserving of celebration!

**Access measures limited by availability** - When we looked into access measures that are considered best practices in other parts of the country, we found that the availability of equipment and local training and certification sometimes prevented people from using these access measures. Access to Braille printers seems to be limited, making it difficult to provide braille format programs. Presently there is only one person living in Nova Scotia who is certified in audio description, which means that organizations wanting to provide the service are dependant on availability or need to pay transportation costs.

**Advocacy and care work is gendered** - While speaking to people doing the work of decolonization and creating accessibility, we discovered that the task of creating change and providing community care is overwhelmingly falling on Two-Spirit, trans, nonbinary, genderqueer people, and on women. Men are almost completely missing. This is difficult, stressful, and emotionally taxing work and if men do not begin to share the labor as allies, those with the least power will continue to burn out.

**Ensuring work is not misrepresented** - Since our system has such little understanding of our communities and cultures, we need to do more work after we have completed our art to make sure that the marketing and promotion do not play into the harmful stereotypes that remain prominent narratives in our society. Disabled performers often have their art celebrated for 'overcoming' their disability in order to create, rather than being celebrated for creating art that showcases their identity. Unfortunately, all this additional work to educate and oversee the narratives connected to our art, which we only have so much control over, is unseen and unpaid.

**Access measures inspire creativity** - The artists currently creating accessible and inclusive performances told us that adding access measures inspired new creative opportunities. When they moved away from the standard performance format an entire world of possibilities presented itself. Imagine ways access measures can add to your storytelling rather than approaching them as another item on your to-do list.

**Art as a healing tool** - The artists we spoke to often referenced the importance of art as a therapeutic tool to heal the hurt of systemic discrimination and the harm of ongoing trauma. But what happens when the tool you are using to heal yourself also causes trauma?

## Important Lesson Learned

### **The current system needs to be torn down and rebuilt - It's too late to adapt it!**

Our communities made it clear that they have suffered years of trauma under the current system and there is no way for the current system to be rebuilt. Instead, it will take a complete reimagining of how we tell our stories.

I struggled in writing this report because I recognize that the intention behind this project was for me to craft recommendations that would be linear and easy for organizations to complete. I realize everyone was hoping for a checklist of ways that those in power can make changes that will affect how they operate or their budgets. But the truth is it will take real effort and personal humbling, funds being reallocated, power being taken away, and most importantly the desire to apply the work or learning and unlearning many lessons. Instead, my core recommendation in this report is to **stop harming people!** If someone tells you that you are causing harm, thank them, and listen without defensiveness or excuses. If the advice they are giving you is not something you are able to accomplish within the current arts systems, then change the system. If everyone stepped forward and refused to be complacent in causing harm, then our arts community would be quickly transformed, and we would find ways to make space for everyone.

Art is our greatest form of activism. For many of us with identities outside the norm, simply standing on stage is an act of defiance. But art serves as a beautiful medium where we don't have to convince anyone or argue our point, we can simply present ourselves and the audience gets to draw their own conclusion. Art is tailored to showing our similarities rather than pointing out our differences. We need to come together to find a way to create a system where we stop placing barriers in the way of certain artists because we don't think they are deserving of this platform.

## **Strengths and Challenges by Artistic Modality**

**Dance** - The dance community is quite welcoming to newcomers, as well as a variety of races and ethnicities, although this is dependent on which type of dance the artist is pursuing. There is less gender diversity and virtually no acceptance of those with visible Disabilities, d/Deaf, blind, and neurodivergent artists. The conversations around inclusion of Mad artists and those with Disabilities are just beginning to happen. Mad dancers are only able to disclose their madness once they are viewed as an established, respected artist. The conversation around Disability inclusion seems to stop at offering Disability dance classes that are being shaped as a gift from the dance community to the Disability community, with no ability to advance beyond the beginner level. Many styles of dance have strict standards around the appearance of the dancer's body and the rules around their technique and lines.

**Music** - The music community seems to be more advanced in their learning process, showing the most representation of our population, although there is still room for improvement. It may be that the music and dance communities are more advanced in their journey toward inclusion because these artists are able to create a piece, rehearse and find ways to get their art distributed, either online or on stage, while having to depend on less people and therefore facing fewer roadblocks. There still needs to be greater education in the industry about how to be more accessible and welcoming to everyone. The system is designed to prioritize funding and showcasing opportunities for musicians of certain musical styles, races, and with a designated body type. The music sector deserves to be celebrated for understanding inclusion more than most modalities. There are many artists like *General Khan, Jahmila, Sluice, Reeny Smith, Zamani, MAJE, T. Thompson, Breagh Isabel, Wren Kelly, Morgan Toney, Emma Stevens, Erin Costelo, and Dena Williams* who are using their craft as a way of education or as resistance. The Nova Scotia music scene has also made real effort to create mentorship programs where established artists, song writers, audio engineers, producers, and publicists share their knowledge and lead the next generation coming behind them. We believe the diversity in our musicians is a direct result of inclusion from the top down in their industry. Musicians highlighted challenges around working late night schedules, in bar environments where alcohol and substances are prominent, and the expectations placed on a touring artist, and ways the industry is difficult on their mental health.



**Theatre** - The theatre community remains a closed space that is very difficult for new artists to break into. The narrative and all decision making are controlled by the production team, and it has created a system where the actor has very little power. The producers making casting choices are often actors themselves, who cast their friends without considering anyone they have not previously worked with. This means we see the same small pool of actors being cast repeatedly by the same company. This not only makes it incredibly difficult for new actors to break into the scene but also means that trying to build diversity in casting is a painfully slow process.

A common complaint we heard was the lack of auditions, or properly advertised audition opportunities, which means that across Nova Scotia there is very little IBPOC representation and virtually no visible Disability, d/Deaf or blind representation. There is some queer representation, but non-binary and trans actors are often forced to place themselves in unwelcoming environments to have opportunities for advancement. There is still very little Two-Spirit representation. Cast and crew with invisible Disabilities, or who identify as Mad or Neurodivergent, live in fear of being outed believing they would face major consequences if they did disclose. The theatre community had the highest level of discrimination and abuse based on our research.

**Musical Theatre** - Musical theatre artists highlighted many issues with casting which make it incredibly exclusive. There is a strong unwillingness to reimagine who can play which roles. Casting remains highly gendered, and these divisions are stuck on an archaic binary that means those assigned male at birth (AMAB) play either the handsome love interest or the villain and those assigned female at birth (AFAB) are cast as the damsel in distress or as the fumbling friend. Non-cisgendered actors seem to be pushed out altogether as they are not understood under this rigid system. The choice of who plays which role is still determined primarily through physical appearance and through their vocal type or range.

Roles and casting are also based on an archaic vocal pedagogy derived from operatic vocal classifications. Modern composers have adjusted their writing style, but performers are still expected to fit into traditional Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Base ranges. This means that casting directors, producers, musical directors, and conductors consider trans and nonbinary performers as unable to be cast, because they don't understand how they fit into the current system.

There is a strong discrimination against those with a higher body mass and anyone non-white in their casting.

It is time that we reimagine who is allowed on the musical theatre stage and that we make room for a spectrum of identities in this genre.

**Drag** - The Halifax Drag scene has been plagued by discrimination for many years. This seems to be rooted in the fact that there is virtually no funding for the artform in Nova Scotia. The producer is typically an experienced Drag performer, who is not only pouring thousand of dollars into developing their own look and performance but is also fronting the entire production cost for the night. They are often fearful to take a chance on anyone they do not feel is guaranteed to sell tickets, meaning they program many of the same types of performers.

We must decentre alcohol from drag performances. When all drag shows happen in bar environments, the drag scene becomes exclusionary to youth, as well as sober artists and audience members. It reinforces the dangerous messaging that Drag art and Queer art can only happen in the shadows, rather than celebrating it as a legitimate art form. For years the Halifax Drag scene was whitewashed, except for a handful of Drag artists, who had spent years fighting for their rights. In recent years there has been a small wave of IBPOC Drag artists, although they are typically only programmed in IBPOC shows and continue to be excluded from the mainstages. The IBPOC artists we spoke to told us they felt that were only being hired as tokens rather than for their talent. Since conducting these interviews several IBPOC Drag performers have chosen to leave the Halifax Drag scene.

Our community consultations also brought up the issue that performers not Assigned Male at Birth (AMAB) feel unwelcome in the local Drag scene. Similar to the complaints we heard from musical theatre artists, AFAB, trans, non-binary, and genderqueer performers are confusing to the cis-male Queens who are programming events and are not treated as equals. There is a big problem with Femme performers being pushed to be Drag Kings, regardless of whether that is the drag they wish to be doing. Trans women can be Queens; Non-binary people can be Queens; AFAB artists can be Queens; AMAB artists can be Queens: but not all drag artists are Queens. There have been many AFAB, trans, and non-binary performers who have tried to enter the Drag scene only to face abuse and discrimination from other members of the Drag community. Many former Drag artists told us they left the scene because of the abuse they suffered. We want to be clear that we are not placing blame on any of the established Drag artists, but rather on a system that has created a need to compete and weed out competition. We need to reimagine the Drag scene in a way that moves away from a self-sustaining model controlled by established artists and provide proper funding to artists before the performance, while allowing for mentorship, support, and celebration of difference!

**Poetry and spoken word** - Poetry and spoken word are highly accessible and inclusive artforms. This stems from the fact that anyone can create poetry and spoken word on their own, without the need for financial investment or equipment. There are however barriers to artists who want to reach a level where their art can be financially viable. Despite the diversity within the modality, it also seems to be a style of art where artists are expected to perform without payment or for tips alone. We need to stop underselling these art forms and value them for the time invested and the talent and emotional vulnerability being shown. I encourage other types of artists to begin inviting underrepresented poets and spoken word artists to open your show and budget to pay them. Let's reach out across modalities and share our spotlight and opportunities.

**Circus** - In the last five years the circus family in Halifax has grown to not only welcome performers with all Disabilities but has also acted as trailblazers for access measures in the larger arts community. A couple of artists started the wave and it moved through the close-knit circus community quickly, before spilling into other arts modalities. There are many queer, trans and non-binary circus artists working locally and most disclose their identities proudly and openly with few incidents of discrimination. There are several areas where improvement still needs to happen. The circus community has a marked problem of systemic racial discrimination which makes it an unwelcoming space for IBPOC artists. Specific infrastructure and equipment needs make the circus community concentrated in the Halifax Regional Municipality, with little chance of expanding to other regions within Nova Scotia as well as creating extensive financial barriers to entry.

## Common Mistakes

**Tokenization** - Many underrepresented artists expressed that they feel tokenized under the current system and reported feeling they were being hired or asked for their opinion, simply to fill a quota. The people we spoke to felt that hiring targets would be dangerous because they make organizations feel they are being inclusive without having to do the work to educate themselves and make changes.

**Telling stories that are not yours to tell** - Disabled, d/Deaf, blind, Neurodivergent, Mad, Indigenous, Black, trans, queer and culturally sensitive stories should never be told by artists without that lived experience. Disability, race, and gender are not things that should be tried on like a costume. There needs to be more conversations around where the line is crossed but you should always speak with community members and consultants to make sure that they are comfortable with the music you are playing, the dances you are performing and the stories you are telling. There is far too much appropriation!

**Defending offensive content** - There has been a trend of organizations choosing a project to work on, dedicating time and money, and falling in love with the piece. They then hire a community consultant who tells them that they should not be telling this story, but they are too connected to the project and cannot hear the critique. Having our expert opinion as a consultant requested and then dismissed can lead to feelings of powerlessness, inadequacy, and further trauma.

**Stop telling underrepresented artists to create their own work** - I can promise that they have already considered this option and realized that it is not so easy. We spend hours justifying our right to simply exist and facing other factors in our life that take up hours of our day, simply navigating a system that was not built for us. To do all this work and to then hear someone invalidate your experience by telling you to simply do more is demoralizing. Not to mention the fact that as an outsider in the arts scene it is very difficult to find people who want to work with you, so you end up taking on every role at every phase of production yourself. Then, you must find funding in a system already unwilling to give you a chance as an artist, to then rent space, pay crew and front countless other expenses, all while trying to market your art to folks who have never heard of you. If you are lucky, you may make it through one very expensive, emotionally, and physically taxing project before you burnout.

**Stop seeing access and inclusion as gifts** - Providing access measures, meeting someone's human rights, and making people feel welcomed are not favors you have the power to choose to give or withhold to those with less power. This antiquated way of thinking only serves to reinforce the current power dynamics. Instead, we need to tear down these harmful structures and start seeing this as artistic collaboration and work together to empower each other.

**Stop using cost as an excuse to remain inaccessible** - When you say that access measures are too expensive to implement, what you are really saying is that you do not place value on the needs of underrepresented artists. There are grants available to cover the cost of access measures, you just need to factor these expenses into your planning from the start.

When you consider the cost on one person's needs prohibitive, you are sending the message to all audience members that their needs will only be considered if they are convenient and affordable. If you are unwilling to budget for the basic human rights of some audience members, then you probably should not be opening your doors to an audience at all.

# Our Recommendations

## Recommendations for Audience Members

**Do your research on an organizations' history and let your money speak** - Look at the website and staff of a company, festival, or venue to see the artists and voices they are prioritizing. If they are not providing the opportunities and amplifying the voices you want to see, then reach out and ask them to adapt their programming and practices. If you do not see progress and the organization does not make the effort to keep you as a patron, inform them that you are taking your funds elsewhere. We have so much power as audience members, but we need to start treating it as a form of resistance.

**Ask for access measures or access needs** - If there are access measures you would like to see or if your access needs are not being met while in the space, then tell them. Ask them to provide the service and tell them how this oversight made you feel. If they do not understand the effect that their lack of consideration has on their audience, then they are unlikely to do the work to make changes.

**Remind organizers to communicate** - For each event you want to attend look at the event information to see if they have clearly communicated the runtime, ticket pricing, affordable ticket options, all access measures they are offering, and what consultants they have on their team. If any of these things are not clearly listed, in formats that are easy to find, then ask them to update this information in all locations.

**Support the good ones!** - When you see an event or organization that excites you, help them advertise by sharing the event information in your circle of friends. If you want to go above and beyond, organize a watch party. There is nothing better than bringing together your community to take up a full row at the drag show or the theatre.

## **Recommendations for Artists**

**Find your community** - It is important to have a community of artists who understand the same challenges you have faced, and who are willing to celebrate the successes as well as navigate the challenges with you.

**Prioritize self-care** - As artists, we tend to prioritize the needs of the production over our own, but it is important to plan for how and when you focus on your own well-being. Share your self-care plan with others and ask those closest to you to indicate when they see you slipping into old habits of pushing yourself too hard and not taking time to rest.

**Use your privilege as power** - Each time you are hired, ask who else is being hired and about their plan for including underrepresented artists and team members. Have a conversation about what access measures will be offered and if they are working with community consultants, while also confirming that the venue is physically accessible. Let them know if you are not satisfied with their answers and weigh whether you still want to play a role in this production.

**Provide your own access and inclusion rider before signing on** - An access rider outlines all the criteria you need met as an artist so that you can be comfortable and focus on your art. This may include access measures like a low sensory room or a scent-free environment. It could also outline needs surrounding your schedule, like having to be finished rehearsals by a certain time. An inclusion rider outlines standards of inclusion and education that you require of the organization you are working with. You can request training for the staff such as anti-oppression or gender inclusivity training, or types of consultants that you would like involved in the project to feel protected. Make a list of must-haves as well as a list of requests you are willing to negotiate. We need all artists to help normalize this behavior and to model conversations around access needs that do not include shame.

**Support your crew** - Crew members often have less power to advocate for themselves than cast members. Ask questions to make sure that their needs are being respected. Ask about the crew schedule and ensure they are being paid a living wage. Do your part to make them feel welcomed. Ask their names and pronouns and get to know them.

**Collaborate** - Look for artists you admire and would love to work with and find ways to work together. Prioritize underrepresented artists who do not have the same opportunities. For an added challenge and more fun, collaborate with artists from different modalities. This will promote everyone's creative thinking and encourage established artists to take risks.

**Ask for mentorships** - On every project there is potential to teach those who have not been given the same learning opportunities as yourself. Whether you are an established artist or an underrepresented artist, everyone should be encouraging mentorship.

**Show works in progress** - The norm is for artists to spend hours, days, or weeks, working away behind closed doors, trying to perfect our art before we let anyone see it. Instead, we need to shift to showing off our work at every phase of the development. Bring in other artists, choreographers, directors, audience members, and friends to give fifteen minutes of their time to offer their thoughts and impressions. Do not be afraid to showcase your work on a larger scale before you feel it is completed. There are many lessons to be learned throughout the process and who knows when someone might come along wanting to collaborate and take the project in a completely different direction.

**Speak up!** - If you see behaviour that you are uncomfortable with, say something. You never know when your voice might save someone else who is too afraid to speak up for themselves. Remember to come from a place of love and respect so that we can all move forward in our journey to unlearn the lessons that do not serve us and dismantle systems of oppression.



## **Recommendations for Producers and Arts Organizations**

**Perform a five-year audit** - Before you start thinking about what to do next, you need to understand your starting point. We suggest looking back at your performances over the past five years and evaluate how many diverse stories you have told. Examine how many IBPOC artists, visibly disabled artists, neurodivergent or Mad artists, openly queer artists, and trans, genderqueer or non-binary artists participated. Finally, consider how much of your staff openly identify with these same identities. This information is not to check boxes and see if you have met the criteria, but rather to make you aware of who is missing from your programming and organization. Once you know your starting point it will enable you to do better.

**Ask the community what they want** - Allow those who are most affected to lead the way and listen to their advice from the very beginning before you make any decisions. Make it a reciprocal exchange of ideas but recognize the power you have in this situation and be sure you do not abuse it.

**Seek board members and staff based on their passion first and their skills and identity second** - There has been a dangerous trend in recent years where organizations will search for board members and staff who have a specific skill or identity that they feel serves the organization. This approach leads to people feeling reduced to a single piece of their identity and means the same few people are being asked to join every board or committee, leading to burnout. Instead look for people who are passionate about the mission of your organization and who are willing to learn. By taking this approach, along with doing the work of decolonizing your organization, I guarantee your team will become happier, as well as a more representative and inclusive community.

**Invite new team members every time** - Whether it is auditioning for a theatre production or hiring technical staff, think critically about which connections and community organizations you want to circulate your call. Clearly state within the call which community members you hope to see apply. Your team also needs to reach out to specific members of underrepresented communities and encourage them to apply. This step takes some time and research, but it is one of the most effective methods of allowing underrepresented artists to feel seen.

**Expand your target audience** - Most producers focus only on attracting white gentrified audience members. If you are only considering this narrow audience, you are leaving

many potential patrons out. 30.4% of Nova Scotia's population over the age of 15 identifies as having at least one disability. 5.4% of the population identify as Indigenous and 2.3% identify as Black. 4% of the Canadian population identifies as 2SLGBTQIA+. In the 2019-2020 year, just over 6,200 immigrants arrived in Nova Scotia. Why would you not consider the needs of these people when they could be your patrons?

**Program the voices and stories your community wants to hear** - Ask your community throughout the year which artists and stories they want to see on your stage and bring together a paid committee, representative of your community, to advise you before you program your content. Do not forget that art is activism and take at least one risk every year.

**Program with forethought** - When programming, do not be short-sighted by thinking of the next few months or a year. Instead, plan who you want showcased now, while also providing support in the form of workshopping, mentorships, networking, and community building for those you hope to program in the coming three to five years. You might even consider paying local underrepresented artists to develop a new piece that can be programmed next year. Do not forget to leave spaces for those that surprise you or who you may discover during your learning process.

**Create a thoughtful land acknowledgement** - Speak to elders in your local Indigenous community and invite them to share the importance of land acknowledgements. Show your appreciation for their time and willingness to share knowledge by asking how your organization can support their community and build an ongoing allyship. Focus on making it a reciprocal exchange rather than focusing solely on gathering knowledge from them. While working to build a relationship in the ways they have outlined, do your own research, and educate yourself about the history of the land and the role you play in these colonial systems. As you learn, re-evaluate your land acknowledgement and make sure that the words are being supported by the actions of your organization. A land acknowledgement is meaningless unless it is supported by work.

**Donate your space and time to community** - Invite leaders of underrepresented organizations to use your space to gather and celebrate their community in whatever way suits them. This must be only about their needs with no expectations on your part. Prioritize donating your space to community at least one week each year and pay your support staff to be there to meet any needs they may have.

**Develop reasonable timelines** – Rehearsal and production schedules are designed with only one type of performer in mind, but the reality is that they do not work for most people. Traditional schedules are highly ableist and do not consider the needs of artists who are unable to leave work or who need to arrange childcare. Producers need to start stretching their rehearsal periods to allow for shorter days with more breaks over a longer rehearsal schedule. This requires budgeting for a longer rental of rehearsal space, but it will greatly expand the number of artists available to participate. Clearly advertise the rehearsal schedule from the beginning and stick to advertised timelines and breaks. Current rehearsal and technical timelines do not consider artists and crew who need rest breaks, snack breaks, bathroom breaks, medication breaks or who need to arrange transportation in advance.

During this process we heard several stories of performers being pushed to their limits during the rehearsal process. Artists were so exhausted at the end of the day that they needed help finding their way home. We need to stop sacrificing our health and our relationships to immerse ourselves in nothing but art for weeks on end.

**Reward rest instead of punishing disability** - Some unions still have practices where they provide a bonus to performers who do not miss any rehearsals or performances. This practice has the unintended consequence of punishing those who have chronic illness and disability, while encouraging artists to come to work even when they are sick or when rest is needed.

There is also a stigma around using understudies, swing performers, and sick days creating an environment where rest is punished.

**Develop a short-term and long-term accessibility and community connection plan** - These plans will outline the steps you want to take to achieve your goals. Remember that building healthy relationships requires making the effort to educate yourself before trust can be earned. Your plans need to outline the steps you will take to be an ally and to unlearn your own harmful behaviours. Be sure to adapt your long-term plans as your community grows.

You should also have an accessibility plan for each of your projects, which outlines how you will ensure that everyone feels welcome and that their needs are being met.

## Recommendations for Everyone

**Adapting funding systems** - Through this process, underrepresented artists talked about the current funding systems placing further barriers in their path to participation. Granting barriers seemed to be the most pronounced in the theatre and dance communities and misunderstood the needs of artists from the Disability, d/Deaf, blind, Mad, neurodivergent and newcomer communities.

The biggest problem raised was that granting bodies do not consider the effects on other aspects of an artist's life when they receive a grant and commit to their regulations. Grants are considered income by our government support systems. This label means the artist is expected to live off the funds before they can receive any government supports, while at the same time these funds were given to create art. I will share an example of my own experience: In 2020 I received a \$500 grant, shared between myself and two other artists, but received in my name. As a result of this money being deposited into my account, I lost all medical supports for five months and it took nearly 70 hours of work on my part to advocate for these supports to be reinstated. This would have been fatal had it not been for mutual aid from my community. Repeatedly we heard this barrier explained to us by artists of all backgrounds.

There must be a system created where grants are clearly labeled and cannot be counted as income or be expected to go toward living or medical expenses.

There also need to be other funding streams created that do not simply come from government. We hope for more privately funded grants sponsored by businesses and organizations. Established artists should consider funding the projects of upcoming artists which excite them. For upcoming artists, consider funding your project in unconventional ways; create an online funding campaign (i.e. GoFundMe), approach businesses, or start a fundraising campaign where you sell goods, services, or previously created art to raise money for new work.

Another problem we heard in our community consultations is that the funding system is set up in ways that forces competition between underrepresented communities. There has been a trend lately encouraging increased funding opportunities to IBPOC artists. We are excited to see the community finally be recognized and be provided with additional funding, but an unintended consequence seems to be that organizations then feel they have checked their box and are now being inclusive without having done any

of the work needed for them to understand the needs of these artists. Also, there seems to be less funding available to other underrepresented artists because organizations now feel they have done the work and don't need to consider who else is being excluded in their community. This competition for limited funding leads to tensions amongst underrepresented communities, as well as artists falsely claiming identities out of desperation without understanding the impact of this choice. There is a mindset that giving an opportunity to one takes away from another, when we would all have more opportunities if we supported each other. We urge all funding bodies and organizations to advertise their grants to anyone who may need them while asking these artists to disclose how they would put this money to use.

We need to rework the funding system in a way that rewards those who are actively working to tear down colonial and capitalist systems rather than reinforcing racist, ableist and gendered practices. Selection of who receives the funds and in what ways need to be given back to the community and cannot be achieved by the current system of selection committee members having two to three minutes to evaluate each application before making a call.

Granting programs also need to be reworked to provide for the access needs of everyone contributing. There must be funding for reasonable timelines and funding to cover the cost of childcare for participants so they can focus on the art.

**Formation of a community arts coalition** - This is a critical recommendation which should be listed as top priority! We need to have a community arts coalition not tied to a single artistic modality or any one arts organization. Instead, it must be led by underrepresented artists and avoid a structure where they are asked to report to the organizations that have historically caused harm or been complicit in the harm. Underrepresented artists will be paid fairly for their expertise. Here are the goals of the coalition as we envision them:

**1. A space for mutual aid** - Every artist we spoke to brought up the need for ongoing conversation about the trauma we face as underrepresented performing artists and how to best support one another. The coalition would enable these closed space conversations. We need a space we can turn to when we are struggling emotionally, mentally, or financially where we would be connected to supports that work for our identity.

Under the current system our thirst for ongoing conversation and connection is not considered because organizations do not see the benefit to them. It is easier to continue

under structures that encourage those with power to enjoy the labour of those below them without considering the harm they are causing.

**2. A space for networking and collaboration** - Within a few short community consultation sessions, we were able to introduce artists who had never met before and who have since collaborated. Collaboration is even more valued in communities of underrepresented artists where we can openly communicate our needs from the start and can use our strengths and creativity to shape exciting new art.

**3. A directory of community resources** - This would be helpful to all community members and could be posted and shared within each venue, on their website and social media accounts. This directory would be designed by underrepresented community members, who must be paid for their work. It could include organizations that provide education, community supports, funding, access measures, and a list of consultants with lived experience.

**4. Culturally appropriate mental health supports** - There is extreme trauma in our artist community, and we need help to heal as much as the arts community needs help in their learning process. The coalition can help connect us to the proper mental health supports that will allow us to process this trauma and be ready to move forward as healthier, happier artists.

**5. A space where the work of educating can be shared** - Whenever there is a conversation about inclusion in the arts, one of the same handful of artists are invited to speak. We bear our souls, discuss our ongoing trauma, are thanked for our participation, and then we do it again the next time, but nothing changes. This is exhausting as well as disheartening and leads to burn out in both our advocacy and in our capacity as artists. Nearly half the artists we spoke with disclosed that they have considered leaving their art practice behind.

A coalition would mean the proper person could be matched to the correct project and we could take turns in advocating, leaving time for self-care. Although we feel community education is an important benefit of an artist-run coalition, we feel it needs to be prioritized after the self-care and support of the artists involved.

**6. A shared workspace and a resource bank** - This is a long-term goal, but it is important to mention. Some small community arts organizations are stretching their resources thin to purchase equipment and infrastructure which could be shared. We would love to see a communal workspace which would provide rehearsal rooms, meeting rooms, office space, hangout, and networking space. There could be a communal bank of multimedia equipment, technology, cash boxes and even some of the more expensive and elusive infrastructure like braille printers and assistive listening devices (ALDs).

We envision this coalition being managed by paid underrepresented artists and would report to a community organization outside of the arts community to avoid systemic power dynamics. Since it is being formed to address the harm caused by our current arts system, it should be funded by current Nova Scotia arts organizations. They would pay sliding-scale fees determined by the size of their organization. Organizations would also be given the opportunity to lessen the fees they pay by undergoing anti-colonialist, anti-oppression, anti-racism, anti-ableism, and Disability Justice training and then donating their time to support the coalition. Established arts organizations would be asked to advocate, alongside us for funding bodies to take over the long-term funding of the coalition. There would be the agreement that funding would not be contingent on the typical colonial, capitalist, racist, ableist, sexist and gendered framework and would remain separate from performance funding currently earmarked for underrepresented artists. We have little doubt that if all arts organizations came together to advocate for this funding, then funding bodies would move quickly to make it happen.

**Formation of a mechanism for reporting** - Many artists felt that there is nowhere they can report when they find themselves in an abusive or dangerous situation. Some have unions where they can file a complaint, but since the unions are part of the harmful system, they often do not understand the issue or have the power to make change. There are many artistic modalities that have no mechanism to speak up other than going directly to the person harming you and taking the risk of being labeled as the problem, destroying your reputation, and losing future opportunities.

**Mentorship** - We as a community must provide a system where mentorship is fostered at every level. The responsibility needs to shift away from the emerging artists to develop their own mentorship opportunities. Instead, we need to support a mentorship system that is built from the top down where mentoring is built into every job at every phase. These mentorships need to not only focus on the performance side of things but also on technical elements, marketing, and preparing to showcase or pitch your work. As underrepresented artists we need to work to build an easier path for the artists coming behind us. Create a list of artists that you hope to guide and advocate to have a mentee on every project you sign onto. These mentorships need to keep in mind intersections of identity which affect each person's experience and ensure that everyone involved in the learning feels comfortable and heard.

**Support underrepresented art that has nothing to do with underrepresented identity -**

Many underrepresented artists complained that they lost paying jobs when they pitched concepts that are not about their underrepresented identities. The identity of an artist cannot be separated from the art they create, which means all art created by a Mad artist is Mad art. We need to stop putting parameters around the types of art anyone 'should' be making.

**Recognize the power of language** - The language used in your space sends a strong message about the beliefs and values of the organization. Think about the history behind the terms you use in everyday conversation and how they might be hurting people. There are many examples but overall, we need to stop suggesting that people's bodies and minds are different, defective, or invalid. Stop asking people to, "get on their feet" or "put your hands together" as other people may not celebrate in this way. Stop using gendered expressions that are now outdated ways of welcoming audiences to your space.

Avoid using terms whose history stems from medical and psychiatric diagnosis, as they are stigmatizing and offensive. Never suggest that you have anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as it minimizes the experience of those who have a formal diagnosis. Ask yourself how many times in a day you use sanist language. Stop referring to people as phobic. Instead consider anti-immigrant, biased/prejudiced/bigoted against Black people, or trans oppressive. You should reconsider terms that have a historic connection to racial and ethnic oppression or that reinforce colonial and systemic oppression. This will likely take education on your part but when someone tells you a term is offensive, listen to them and make the change in your vocabulary.

As an arts organization, you have a responsibility to create policy around language which will not be tolerated in your space. When correcting someone who is using offensive language, come from a place of love so they can learn and do better moving forward.

**Ask names and pronouns** - Normalize beginning every interaction by asking people to confirm the pronunciation of their name and to clarify their pronouns. When someone is sharing their identity, make an honest effort to listen and learn. For those working with the public it might not be possible to learn the name and pronouns of every patron, but never make assumptions. Make the effort to learn inclusive language that makes everyone feel welcome in the space.



**Stop non-consensual touch and unwelcome questions** - Never touch another person's body without asking first. You may have intended it as an act of connection, but it may not be felt that way to the recipient.

This right must extend to everyone equally. Blind and partially sighted people should never be grabbed, touched, or guided without their consent. Mobility aids and prosthetics are extensions of that person's body and should never be touched or moved without clear permission. You should not ask personal questions about someone's body just because it is different than your own. Do not ask to touch someone's hair or how they use the bathroom just because you are curious. You are not owed anyone's personal information.

**Re-imagine the definition of 'legitimate' art** - Most underrepresented artists working in Nova Scotia are celebrating the things that make them unique and using their strengths to set themselves apart from the norm. This has allowed them to find occasional paid work but also leaves them open to discrimination.

We as an arts community need to reimagine the many rules around what makes good art. Take chances around the type of performances you attend as an audience member. Choreographers, directors, and producers need to open their minds to more experimental forms of performance and movement. Let the artists show you the art they want to make, and I promise their innovation will blow your mind!

We witnessed the perfect example of this during one of our sidewalk chats when we asked people to write out or tell us if they felt welcome in the arts. One considered it for a while and still was not sure what to write. They then asked if they could draw a picture instead. For the next forty minutes they sat at a makeshift table outside the gates of the Public Gardens and drew. Passersby stopped to watch what they were creating, and some offered their thoughts as well. This one artist's bravery in asking to adjust our criteria allowed a community to be created on the sidewalk that day. The artwork they created has hung on my wall as inspiration for this project ever since.

**Transition supports and skills maintenance** - Artists said there needs to be more supports for those completing their art education and transitioning into a career as a professional artist. We would love to see more refresher courses offered to professional artists who want to practice techniques and learn new skills. One participant described this as needing an 'artist gym' where they can build their artistic muscles.

**Advocate for queer space** - Our queer community has lost its' queer-run spaces. It is imperative that the community have a place to gather and grow in an environment where everyone can share all aspects of their identity without fear or judgment. The community needs to step up as allies and ask what can be done to support the creation of new accessible, IBPOC inclusive, queer performance space.

**Stop using inaccessible spaces** - We recognize that there is an extreme shortage of performance spaces in Halifax and even fewer are accessible, but if you are inviting people into a space that only certain people can use, should you really be using it? Be sure that you are considering accessibility for both audience and performers. If we all stopped using venues that are inaccessible, then the arts community would be fighting for the creation of welcoming, accessible spaces.

**Create more performance spaces** - There is a major shortage of performance venues in Nova Scotia which means that only the most experienced artists can find rehearsal and performance space. As a result, emerging artists and smaller organizations are not able to show their work. If we do not address this problem soon, the next generation of performers will disappear and there will be no chance of transforming the arts sector into an inclusive space.

We must prioritize performance spaces of all sizes, not simply the large 100+ seat theatres. Everyone needs to join forces to brainstorm ways of creating performance spaces. Then, we need to advocate to the government of Nova Scotia, the Halifax Regional Municipality, as well as to our governing arts bodies (Arts Nova Scotia, Dance Nova Scotia, Music Nova Scotia, and Theatre Nova Scotia) for support in creating and keeping much needed performance spaces that are fully accessible and inclusive.

**Avoid defensiveness when receiving feedback** - Thank the person offering the advice, apologize for the barrier, do the work to educate yourself, and work to correct it (whether that takes five minutes or five years).

**Do not be afraid to move out of the way** - Sometimes we need to recognize that there is nothing else we can do from the position we currently hold. When this happens, you need to step out of the way to allow someone else to step into a position of power. There are always ways we can be effective in changing the system, it just may not be the way you originally envisioned it. Do not be afraid to start over with a new approach.

## Ways of Measuring Progress

This section outlines a list of items that every arts organization should already be doing, followed by suggestions of things you might consider doing if you want to be accessible and inclusive. This is NOT a checklist! You still need to do your own research on each of these suggestions to determine how it fits within your organization and how best to implement it. Find consultants with lived experience and hire them to help you along this process. There are many of us doing this work with the two-fold motivation of creating change and funding our own artistic practice.

## The Following are Things Every Organization MUST Provide

### Staff Training and Supports

**Representative staff** - Ensure your staff is representative of the diversity of the larger community. From your volunteers to your front of house staff, your office staff, your technical crew, and especially your executive and board, there should be a cross-section of identities represented. If this is not true, it is a symptom of where you are in your learning process and there is more work to be done.

**Training and Education** - You should be providing training for your board, staff and volunteers that includes anti-oppression, anti-racism, anti-colonial, Disability Justice, Disability awareness, gender and sexuality awareness, cultural awareness, local IBPOC history, and active listening education. Offer at least three education sessions each year. This training needs to be led by those with lived experience, and they must be paid for their time and knowledge sharing.

**Providing staff with the tools** - Does your staff feel supported in their learning process? Have you provided them with the knowledge and language to comfortably communicate with the public about the beliefs and policies of your organization? If they are not ready, provide them with further supports.

**Hire consultants** - For every project you should consider hiring an accessibility consultant, an IBPOC consultant, a language consultant, an intimacy coordinator, and an interlocutor. Each project may not require the hiring of all these consultants, but there

should be a conversation about the importance of each for your current project. Until access measures are normalized in Nova Scotia, we recommend you hire an accessibility consultant for every project. The more underrepresented community members you have on your creative team, the more likely they will spot problems early in the process while they can easily be corrected.

**Job calls** - Be sure every board call, job posting, performer call, and volunteer call is specific about exactly who you are encouraging to apply. Do specific outreach to the communities you hope will participate and don't be discouraged if you do not see the response you would like. This same level of thought needs to go into all your hiring practices, such as photographers, videographers, social media consultants, graphic designers, and payroll specialists.

**Payment options** - Provide multiple options for staff and consultant payment every time. Some payment methods force the recipient to provide their deadname or leave a paper trail that complicates receiving their medical supports. When multiple options are offered, the recipient can choose a method which works for them.

**Listen to front of house** - Seek expert knowledge from your front of house staff. These are the people who are on the front lines, dealing with your patrons every day and they know where the strengths and weaknesses of the organization lie. They are your best connection to the community you serve.

**Learning and communication styles** - Discover how your staff learns, communicates, and creates. Trust them to complete the work in whatever way is best for them and allow them to work within their preferred style whenever possible. This may mean adjusting their working hours to fit their schedule, allowing them to work from home, or allowing them to present reports in ways that align with their strengths. It might be as simple as adjusting your communication approach to see how successful they can be.

**Access needs for staff** - Ask your staff about their access needs and then collaborate with them to make sure that your work environment feels safe to them. Ask everyone, regardless of the length of time they will be working for you. Do not assume that people's needs remain consistent over time. Be sure to ask again at least once a year. Determine who on your staff is responsible for ensuring that everyone's access needs are met.

## **Audience Supports**

**Run times** - Provide clearly advertised run times for all events so everyone can plan their transportation and childcare.

**Sit and wait** - Provide portable seating wherever patrons are lined up. If they are lined up waiting to enter your venue, have volunteers or staff walk the line with folding chairs. Also, have a policy to account for those who are not able to wait in line and make sure your patrons know how to inform you if they cannot line up.

**Priority seating** - Provide adequate priority seating for those using ASL interpretation, those who are hard of hearing, mobility device users, and anyone else who needs it. There should be several sections of priority seating, so patrons are able to choose a space that suits their needs. The placement of the priority seating should be determined by consulting your ASL interpreters and your accessibility consultant. Be aware that patrons requiring priority seating will need to be seated with their entire party, so make sure that this area is large enough to accommodate everyone. Consider space needed by those using different mobility devices to ensure that they, as well as everyone around them, can sit comfortably and have clear sightlines. If your space has assigned seating and a patron needs to request priority seating in advance, be sure that the process to request priority seating is clearly stated at the time of ticket purchase. This process can be very othering so please consult with your accessibility consultant and community members to develop best practices.

**Companion tickets** - Provide a free companion ticket to anyone who purchases a ticket and needs a support person to accompany them. Be sure to clearly advertise that you offer this option next to your ticket links and provide clear instructions on how they can request a companion ticket. Some arts organizations register with the Access2 Card Program through Easter Seals Canada, so make sure that your box office staff is familiar with what this card means and how to make sure the patron receives their tickets.

**Pay-What-You-Can tickets** - Offer pay-what-you-can or tiered ticket prices every time. Some projects have found community sponsorship to cover the cost of a certain number of tickets to then donate to underrepresented communities who would not typically be able to access the event. Clearly advertise all ticket options and ensure that there is a way for patrons to purchase tickets if they do not want to purchase online or if they do not have access to a credit card or PayPal.

**Service animals** - Does your staff have training on how to behave around service animals? Do they know which seating is located ideally for patrons attending with their service animal? This will likely change with each production, but you should consider space for the animal to stretch out, traffic patterns through the venue, action happening on stage, and proximity to noise and lighting levels. These discussions should happen with your accessibility coordinator before each event takes place.

**Feedback options** - Provide multiple ways of providing feedback from audience members, performers, and staff. Make sure that these methods are accessible to those with various access needs and are clearly advertised both in person and online.

## **Preparing Your Space**

**Space representative of community** - Your physical space should reflect the art and culture of the community around you. This may be your venue, or it may relate to your office space, anywhere you are claiming as your own. Is the art on the walls and the music being played representative of the community and presented in a variety of formats that can be enjoyed by everyone?

**Navigating your space** - Are all areas of your venue and offices accessible to those using mobility devices? Do you use wayfinding measures to guide individuals who are blind or partially sighted, or those relying on other senses for navigation? Are pathways wide enough that two ASL users can walk side-by-side and carry on their conversation? Consider public space as well as staff and performer spaces such as backstage, box office, the tech booth, rehearsal space, and all office space.

**Inclusive washrooms** - Provide washrooms that are accessible and gender inclusive in public spaces and behind the scenes for performers and crew. Most people do not understand what it means for a washroom to be truly accessible so have yours assessed by mobility device users. Be sure to have a chair or bench in your bathrooms and dressing rooms so that a user can sit down if they are trying to change clothing. There also needs to be an adequate number of washrooms available for the size of your venue.

**Provide waste baskets** - Place waste baskets inside of each bathroom stall so patrons do not have to carry sanitary products or medical equipment into the public spaces for

disposal. Make sure that waste baskets are covered so that you do not have to leave items in plain sight. This rule applies for all washrooms, not only ones traditionally assigned to a specific gender. Consider whether it is possible to provide at least one stall with a sink inside for those who need running water for medical procedures or to clean a menstrual cup.

**Naloxone kits** - Have Naloxone kits on site and ensure your staff has Naloxone training.

**First aid kits** - Ensure you have well stocked first aid kits, and your staff has up to date first aid training and knowledge in how to administer an EpiPen. First aid kits should be in the lobby and backstage.

**Sharps containers** - Have a sharps container in your bathrooms and in your dressing rooms.

## **Access Measures**

**American Sign Language (ASL) Interpretation** - ASL should be offered for every performance. The sooner ASL Interpreters can be brought into the collaborative process the better.

There are many approaches to integrating ASL interpreters into the performance. Traditionally, Nova Scotia only saw the ASL interpreter standing off to the side of the stage and signing for everyone at once. This is not the best approach as anyone trying to follow the interpreter must continuously shift their focus between the interpreter and the action at center stage. In the last five years, we have seen a few examples of shadow interpreting, meaning that there is a different interpreter for each person speaking and the interpreters are standing within the scene, close to the actor for which they are interpreting. Most recently, we witnessed the first fully integrated piece of theatre in Atlantic Canada, *At This Hour*, when *Signs of the Maritimes Deaf Theatre Troupe* collaborated with *Zuppa Theatre Co*. In this piece, a signing actor and a speaking actor were paired together, delivering their lines simultaneously in their own language, representing a single character.

There are many factors that must be considered when choosing the right interpreter for the job, but the choice should never be made without consulting someone who signs. Do not forget to consider whether there are any lived experiences that need to be understood to tell the story. For example, if you are telling a queer story, always hire

queer interpreters. Be sure to set your interpreters up for success by providing them the information and resources they require. Send a full outline, script, and the lyrics to all songs at least two weeks in advance of the opening. Be aware ASL interpreting requires extreme focus and expressiveness, which means you will need multiple interpreters on your team, as they will switch off every fifteen minutes to allow the interpreter to rest.

**Audio description** - Provide audio description, verbal description, or enhanced narration for blind and partially sighted audiences on all your projects. These are ways of describing key visual elements happening on stage, often described as speaking pictorially, each with their own rules and subtle differences. Audio description has strict rules governing what information is relayed. Verbal description, also called creative description, typically uses fewer words and relays feelings and themes from the piece. Enhanced narration is a hybrid form of narrating the story which can take any artistic form and gives full creative control to the community consultants structuring the description. Here in Nova Scotia, we only have one trained audio describer, so it has become more common to provide enhanced narration. Audio descriptions are typically shared through a handheld receiver and an earpiece, although some local groups are choosing to integrate their description or narration into the live performance to normalize the practice.

These forms of description are typically pre-recorded or being read live from a script, but there is sometimes live description where someone watches the action as it is happening and relays the information in real time to audience members. Live description works best for performances that rely highly on improvisation, although the level of success depends on the skills of the describer, their understanding of which elements are most important to relay, and their understanding of the patrons they are describing for.

Be aware that descriptions are never neutral in the arts and hold a great deal of power. The lived experiences and biases of the describer will shape their choice of language and the way they describe the art. Because of these factors, descriptions may be incongruent with the identity, motivations, or intentions of the artist. Whenever possible, the describer, narrator or host needs to consult with the artist when creating the descriptions to minimize unintended harm.

We would like to recognize the team behind the first audio described music video, which was released this year in Nova Scotia. Musician *Christina Martin* released her video for *Stay with Me*, which was created with help from audio describer *Kat Germain*, with blind community consultant *Milena Khazanavicius* and her guide dog *Louis*, and with *Sensory Friendly Solutions* out of New-Brunswick. Martin celebrated the launch of



her music video by having a wheelchair accessible, relaxed performance in Halifax, with ASL interpretation and live audio description provided.

**CART services** - Provide Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services or surtitles for all live events, and open or closed captions for recorded or online events. CART and captioning can be helpful tools for those who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing and for neurodivergent individuals.

**Microphones** - Use a microphone whenever there are fifteen or more people in a room. Do not assume that you can project. You never know who is hard of hearing and they deserve all the same information. Do not forget to remove your mask when speaking and make sure not to turn your back away from the audience or block your lips with the microphone or papers, as people may be relying on reading your lips to understand.

**Sighted guide training** - Does your staff have sighted guide training, so they are able to direct those who are blind or partially sighted? A sighted guide leads an individual through the space while avoiding any dangers. When the guide stops moving, they will explain the layout of the space (i.e. we have arrived at your seat which is a foot in front of you). There are specific rules to guiding someone in a safe and respectful way. Training needs to be provided by someone who is themselves blind or partially sighted, and they must be paid for their time and expertise. Sighted guides are also helpful for those needing balance and mobility support.

Once a guide has asked and confirmed that a patron wants assistance, they stand slightly in front of the individual and invite that person to hold their bent elbow. The guide then moves through the space as they typically would, and the patron will sense their movement through the guide's arm.

**Touch tours** - Provide touch tours before the show for those who are blind or partially sighted. Some organizations invite neurodivergent audience members and children to also experience the touch tour and if there is time, invite anyone else who would like to participate. Be aware that the more you open to everyone, the more time you will need to budget. During a touch tour a patron is guided through the set pieces, props, and costumes while an audio describer, stage manager, staff or cast members will act as a sighted guide, giving visual descriptions. The cast will be introduced and will introduce their character, allowing the audience member to familiarize themselves with each person's voice. The tour leader may also discuss historical context or behind the scenes information about the show.

## **Sensory Input**

**Flashing lights** - Stop using fluorescent lights, strobe lights, flickering lights or perpetual motion video projections as they trigger neurological reactions such as epileptic seizures and flicker vertigo. If their use is deemed necessary, include a warning on your event page, your ticketing page, have warnings posted at the entrance to the venue, and make an announcement at the beginning of the show outlining what effect will happen and when it occurs during the performance. Make sure everyone is informed during the rehearsal process as well.

**Loud noises** - Avoid using sudden or loud noises. If they must be used, warn your audience. Post warnings at the entrance to the venue and make an announcement at the beginning of the show that describes the type of sound and when it will occur during the performance.

**Smoke, fog, and haze** - Limit the use of smoke, fog, or haze in your performance. When it must be used, ensure you are using a product that is allergen-free, scent free and hypoallergenic. Post warnings on the event page, on the ticketing page, at the entrance to the venue, and make an announcement at the beginning of the show that describes the type of effect and when it will be happening. Have the product name and a list of its ingredients on site and available upon request before the show.

**Relaxed performances** - Offer relaxed performances where the event is adapted to take a more laid-back approach and consider the needs of those with sensory or communication disorders, neurodivergent audience members, young audience members, patrons with anxiety and anyone who would benefit from a more relaxed experience.

The relaxed performance experience starts with a clear explanation of what your relaxed performance will be like on your ticketing page. Share your access guide, visual story, and electronic program with ticket holders a few days before the performance. Make sure your staff have appropriate training, are aware that they will need to answer more audience questions and feel comfortable communicating with patrons with various access needs. Work with your accessibility consultant and community members to conduct a performance audit and determine which elements may trigger sensory overload.

Adjust sound and lighting levels to avoid extremes, meaning slower and less intense lighting changes and lower sound levels. Reconsider visual effects as well as sudden

movements or surprising actions and decide if they are necessary. Communicate the triggering elements you decide to keep to your audience. Reduce the length, volume, and intensity of any raised voices.

When the relaxed performance starts, have a staff member come onto the stage to welcome everyone and explain what to expect during the show. Let the audience know they can move around, make noise, vocalize, and come and go from the theatre; whatever makes them comfortable. Some organizations will bring performers and any crew that will appear on stage out to introduce themselves and their role.

During the show the doors stay open between the theatre and the lobby and house light stays on, usually slightly dimmed. Provide a calm space separate from the main performance space, designed with reduced sensory stimulation. Patrons can visit this space to take a break from the crowds and action of the performance.

At the end of the show, performers can return to the stage as themselves to say goodbye to the audience. Always ask for feedback from the audience and staff when you offer a relaxed performance so you can learn how to improve for future performances.

**Sensory rooms** - Provide a sensory room, also known as a calm room, at every event. This is a space where people can escape the sensory input of the main performance area or busy lobby and spend a moment allowing their neurological system to reset and their anxiety to calm. Elements of a sensory room include lowered lighting, minimal background noise, neutral colours, greenery, cushions, and blankets, and a various styled of comfortable seating throughout the room. You may also consider providing sensory kits in the space. These are portable kits which are made up of a collection of items that can help calm a person in an overstimulated environment. Some items you might include are earplugs or headphones, an eye mask, fidget spinners, fidget poppers, sensory mats, some play dough, rocks or marbles, a stress ball, essential oils, scratch and sniff stickers, a sensory bottle or sand timer, pipe cleaners, a colouring book and pencil crayons, a notebook, meditation cards, yoga poses flashcards, and a jump rope.

## **Join the Movement**

**Embrace activist art!** - This includes IBPOC art, Queer art, Disability art, Crip art, d/Deaf art, Mad art, Aging and Elder art, and Fat art. These play a critical role in reframing society's thoughts around the validity of our non-normative bodies and minds. The more these art forms grow, the more these artists will need space and support to showcase their talents.

**Desire disruption** - When you always play it safe you will never grow as an organization. Push boundaries and step outside the norm, and we guarantee you will find new levels of creativity and opportunity!

# **The Following are Things to Consider Implementing**

## **Tips and Tools for Communication**

### **Social media**

- Use alt text, image descriptions, video descriptions and captions for all social media posts.
- When writing hashtags, capitalize the first letter of each word. This practice allows screen readers to recognize the start of a new word and is known as Camel case. For example, #AccessibilityProject, #TransTheatre, #BlackLivesMatter, #AbledsAreWeird, or #StopUpholdingWhiteSupremacy.
- Limit the use of emojis (they cannot be understood by screen readers and are subjective).

### **Online meetings and public speaking events**

- Everyone speaking should begin by giving a visual description of themselves. State your name and pronouns before you begin speaking and end your statement with “end of thought”.
- Speaking slowly and clearly takes into consideration the needs of those listening, as well as the ASL interpreters.
- Be sure only one person is speaking at a time.
- Use plain language whenever possible. Avoid using jargon, shorthand, abbreviations which assume a level of comprehension, or idioms.

### **Performances**

- Have an access measures section in all public communication.
- Create transcripts of all spoken, video and printed material for those following along and for those using screen readers. Transcripts should be provided in both a PDF version and a text only Word doc version. Have transcripts available in a hard copy format as well as in a digital version that the audience can access on their phone.
- Provide large print format (at least a 16-point font), plain text format, braille format, and visual storytelling format programs.
- A language legend will outline what level of language comprehension is required to follow the storyline. Will it be beginner level or Shakespeare level?

## **All printed materials**

- Use color contrast in all visuals (to test, shift image to grayscale and confirm it is still clear).
- Black ink on white paper is recommended. Use a plain Sans Serif font (some examples are Helvetica, Arial, Calibri and Comic Sans) in at least a 14-point font.

**Accessibility videos** - Consider creating accessibility videos of familiarization visits for your venue. An accessibility video is designed and hosted by either your accessibility consultant or by a paid community consultants with lived experience. These videos can show the closest bus stops, the parking lot, main entrances, lobby space, box office, bar, washrooms, auditorium and emergency exits.

Accessibility videos should include:

- A visual of the exterior of the venue where patrons will be arriving
- A clear visual representation of the space
- Verbal description of the space
- Description and visuals of the path a patron will travel from one area to the next
- Mention any wayfinding measures
- Highlight any challenges, triggers, or sensory overload they may encounter (i.e. a lip in a doorway, discussions of trauma, space has an echo)

A familiarization visit is a clearly advertised time when patrons can come visit the space and speak to staff to have all their questions answered and to become more comfortable with the venue before the performance.

**Access guides** - Create an access guide for each event you produce. Your access guide outlines both the ways your organization is working to become more accessible and inclusive and lists the access measures for that specific event. This can serve as a reference for patrons to determine whether your event meets their needs. Once you create your first guide it can be adapted for future events.

**Visual storytelling** - Explore the options that visual storytelling can provide for your organization. Visual storytelling is a narrative told through a series of messages using visual multimedia like graphics, images, pictures, or videos. Visual narratives make the story easier to understand by relying less on language. They become more relevant, more imaginative, and are another way to create an emotional connection with your audience. Some organizations are starting to use visual storytelling in their

performances, to prepare the audience with a visual outline of the story they are about to witness. Some are also hiring visual note takers in meetings to capture a visual record of what was said in real time.

**Background information** - Provide background information and historical information on the event when relevant. This could be included with your access guide beforehand, or as part of the program on the day of the event.

**Warnings** - Use content warnings and trigger warnings. These warnings describe content that might be upsetting or elicit a strong emotional response. They should be posted on the event page, ticketing page as well as be included in a pre-show announcement.

**ASL interpretation in the lobby** - Now that you are providing ASL interpretation for your performances, you need to think about whether you will have interpreters at the box office, bar and at the front of house to assist with communication. If you do not provide interpreters prior to the performance, have you prepared your staff in clear communication? Will they use written communication on note tablets or whiteboards? Will they type on their phone?

**Communication boards** - Consider providing staff training to familiarize them with communication boards and how they are used. Communication boards are often used by people who are nonverbal, but they can also be a helpful tool when communicating with someone who is d/Deaf or hard of hearing or anyone who does not speak the language. Think about creating your own communication board with images useful for your organization and keeping it at the box office.

**Active listeners** - Consider having paid active listeners on site. The role of an active listener is to provide a space for debriefing, offering support and resources. The more we embrace art as activism, the more your audience will need support to process their feelings as we create change together.

## **Shaping Your Environment**

**Parking and transportation** - Does your space have adequate parking? Is your parking lot well lit and are there clear sightlines from inside the building to the far end of the parking lot? If there is no parking lot and patrons need to walk a distance to return to their vehicles, do you have an option to accompany patrons who are uncomfortable walking to their car or the bus stop on their own?

Does your parking lot have adequate accessible parking spaces? The recommendation is that 2-4% of the parking in your lot should be accessible spaces but considering that Nova Scotia has the highest rate of Disabled people in the country at 30.4%, we would suggest having an even higher percentage. These spaces should be close to an entrance, should be well lit and must be on a flat surface. Accessible spaces should have a crosshatch (blue diagonal lines) between them to allow space for someone to deploy an access ramp and should have signage painted on the pavement, as well as raised signage in front of the space that will remain visible if there is snow on the ground or when painted symbols fade.

Is there adequate accessible street parking within two blocks that does not require someone to travel uphill to access? Did you know your business can ask the municipality to have accessible parking added close to your business?

Have you checked the paths to all the closest bus stops? Are these accessible bus routes? Are there adequate curb cuts and crosswalks to allow someone using a mobility device to travel the path? Do the curb cuts have tactile pavement or wayfinding markers, and do the crosswalks have locator tones (the sound that tells you when to cross) for pedestrians who are blind or partially sighted? Are these routes advertised on your website both in writing and in video format? These are important questions to address when promoting an accessible venue.

**Mobility device lending** - Do you have mobility devices that patrons are able to use while on site? Consider having a basic transport wheelchair and a walker available for patrons upon request. Advertise that these are available on your website but also have signage in the space that lets the public know they are available and how to request one.

**Food and drink** - Consider hosting dry and sober events.

Ensure that you have water available and consider whether you should have food or snacks available as well. Be mindful of common food allergens (i.e. peanuts, tree nuts,



etc.) as well as foods with strong smells. Extreme sensory responses, or anaphylactic reactions can be triggered in someone who has food aversions or allergies. Avoid serving these foods or allowing patrons to bring them into your venue.

**Scents** - Consider having a scent-free environment policy and using natural cleaning products.

**Seating** - Is your seating inclusive? Can you provide different size of chairs? Can you provide seating made of different types of materials? Firm chairs or armrests might work for some patrons but not for others. If you have a tiered auditorium and someone uses their wheelchair, are they sitting on an incline and bracing their body the entire performance? Inclusive seating means that the same level of comfort is provided to every individual throughout the performance.

## **Care Policies**

**Childcare** - Provide childcare options for cast, crew and staff members during rehearsals and performance times, or institute a policy where children are welcome to attend rehearsals with their parents. This allows parents to participate without the added cost of childcare.

**Dressing rooms and wardrobe** - Are your policies around who has access to dressing rooms and wardrobe spaces clearly advertised and enforced? Often these areas can become a social space where performers invite their friends to visit. This creates an environment where performers have little control over who has access to their body. Does your wardrobe department have proper training on working with different body types? Have you taught them respectful language and made consent practices clear? These individuals will often learn information about a person's gender identity, Disability identity and body dysphoria and need to be taught how to deal with this information respectfully.

**Exiting safely** - Is the performer and crew exit well lit and does it have security cameras? Your cast and crew should be safe when leaving your building and it is your responsibility to ensure that they are able to get home safely. Do you have policies or options for carpooling and co-walking to ensure that no one needs to leave alone?

**First responders** - Does your organization have a policy around if or when police and/or emergency medical personnel will be allowed on your property? Is your policy clearly advertised to all members of your community so they can choose if this is a space where they feel comfortable?

## **Sensory Awareness**

**Lighting** - Consider the best level for your house lights. Should they be left off, with access lighting illuminating pathways to enhance the atmosphere in the space or should there be low light to allow the audience to see the space, increasing access and reducing anxiety?

**Applause** - Are standing ovations an outdated behaviour? When audience members stand up it blocks sightlines for those relying on ASL interpretation, surtitles, or CART services, and for those unable to stand. We would encourage organizations to adopt a policy that discourages standing ovations. Consider other options. Encourage alternate forms of applause, including Deaf applause or silent applause (waving both hands in the air using a twisting movement), finger-snapping, or a vocal cheer. The more options available the more inclusive it becomes. Also, a room full of people clapping their hands can be overwhelming for those with auditory sensitivities.

**Feel the vibrations** - Music centered performances should consider having latex-free balloons available upon request for anyone who is d/Deaf or hard-of-hearing. When the balloon is inflated and hugged against their body, they will feel the vibrations of the music through the balloon. You can also consider having priority seating close to a speaker, which would have metal or wooden chairs on a solid floor and encourage your audience to remove their footwear (if it is safe) and place their socked feet on the floor, in order to sense the vibrations. You could also explore the vibrotactile arts and the exciting technology that comes with it and host a performance celebrating the vibration where audience members are invited to lay on the floor and allow the vibrations to move through them. Ask your consultants for exciting ways to visually represent the vibrations and project these images on the walls.

## **Next Generation Supports**

**Live streaming and online content** - Live streaming events whenever possible allows access for patrons who may not be able to leave their home. This increases your events' accessibility but only if you consider what access measures are needed to make a live streamed event welcoming for everyone.

Consider providing bonus online content as part of your events so that those who are not able to attend in person can participate without feeling as though they are settling.

**Listening devices** - Consider whether your venue or organization can provide Assistive Listening Systems (ALSs) also known as Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs). These are devices that can be worn by someone who is hard of hearing to separate speech from background noise or amplify sounds to make a performance easier to follow.

**Next level ASL** - Once the use of ASL Interpretation has been normalized in all performances and once we have advocated as an industry for the cost of these services to be covered by our government in line with our basic human rights, we would like to expand the conversation to the use of d/Deaf Interpreters and Hearing Interpreters and how the two work together to provide higher quality interpretation.

## **Community Connections**

**Audit** - Conduct an accessibility and inclusion audit of your venue and organization. This will be an ongoing process, not a one-time event!

**Know your history** - Do you know the history of the land on which you are working? Research the name and history of the Mi'kmaq community where the performance is taking place. Next, invite the elders to share their experience and invite them to your event. Think about what other communities make up the neighbourhood around you and educate yourself on their history and culture, while continuously inviting them in.

**Smudging** - Do you have a policy to provide smudging and the community connections to make it happen if an artist requests it?

**Holidays** - Do you schedule events around holidays? Are you only considering the Christian holidays? Start thinking about the community you are serving and schedule

around their holidays as well as around the timelines of their cultural practices. Are there any special considerations that you will need to plan for (i.e. Will they need head coverings? Will you need to schedule around prayer times? Is there a respectful greeting that you should learn?) Are there somber dates when you should be conscious of your scheduling?

**Competing access needs** - Remember that the needs of one individual may compete or contrast with the needs of the next person. There is no one way to be accessible or inclusive to everyone but do your best to be inclusive.

**Collaboration** - Provide funding to artists you would not expect to work together and see how their collaboration will enhance everyone's art. What happens when a d/Deaf Drag performer collaborates with a hearing musician? How can their strengths and unique approach to their artforms strengthen everyone's art? What about when a blind visual artist collaborates with a dancer? The possibilities are endless!

**Support community work** - Support the work of leaders in the Indigenous and Black communities, as well as Disability Doulas (also known as Crip Doulas). There are many ways to support but make sure that financial support is one piece of this puzzle.

**Awards for access and inclusion** - The three major arts bodies in Nova Scotia should consider offering awards for those who are doing the work and making change in their communities. We have awards for artistic merit, but they need to also encourage and recognize those with a strong understanding of the human experience who are working to make our system more authentic and inclusive.

## **Final Thoughts**

It is important to recognize that the conversations about the future of our industry in a post-Covid world are problematic. It is assumed that we will return to a better way of life but for many of us, there was never a time to remember fondly. We do not want to go back to the way things used to be, nor can we envision being able to leave behind the isolation and discrimination. During the pandemic, changes were made to provide access because those with power had unmet needs. Today, underrepresented artists are asking whether these new access measures and considerations will remain once those with power no longer need community support.

The Eastern Front Theatre Accessibility Project has been an invitation to those in power to enter the world of underrepresented artists and understand how you can stop placing roadblocks in the way of our artistic goals. Instead, become an ally and amplify our voices. I recognize that my experience is only my own and that some underrepresented artists will disagree with information shared in this report. Let this be a starting point in the conversation. I have committed to every participant in this process that I will find a way to continue these conversations and work to unite the many lonely fighters in this artistic civil rights movement. I invite everyone to come out of the shadows and stand together to show just how powerful we are when we are no longer hiding.

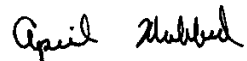
I want to thank my team of community consultants who gave of their time, knowledge, and passion. You trusted me to lead and showed me kindness in your corrections, while generously sharing your lives.

Thanks to the Eastern Front Theatre team for recognizing the need for this information to become part of the public dialogue and prioritizing this project. Kat and Elsa, you granted me a gift I had not yet experienced as a Disabled woman when you placed your trust in me to gather knowledge, while respecting the needs and identity of each person.

Endless gratitude to everyone who shared their experiences with us and who trusted us to act as messengers. My appreciation goes out to the strangers who spoke to us on the street, the directors representing their arts organizations, and to the many artists who allowed themselves to be vulnerable with the hope that we can make change. I want to celebrate all the underrepresented artists whose creativity and innovation have been

developed through years of working within a world not designed for us. We survive hate, slurs, institutionalization, criminalization of our bodies, white-supremacy, and genocide, while channeling our pain into beauty. As artists, we have a deep understanding of the human experience make them phenomenal storytellers. It is time we get out of the way and allow them to create amazing art!

Thank you for taking the time to read this report. Caring enough to hear our stories is the first step. What you choose to do with this information will send a very powerful message to the thousands of underrepresented artists across Nova Scotia who are waiting for support in this fight. What will you do now?

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "April Hubbard". The script is cursive and fluid.

April Hubbard  
(she/her)  
K'jipuktuk  
Crip Artist, Mad Artist and Disability Advocate  
Coordinator of the Eastern Front Theatre Accessibility Project

## Glossary of Terms

**2SLGBTQIA+** - An acronym which refers to Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual, while the + represents the countless affirmative ways a person may express their sexuality or gender outside of the heteronormative binary. The 2S (representing Two-Spirit) has been moved to be listed first as a way of recognizing that Indigenous peoples were the first to inhabit our land.

**Ableism (ableist)** - Discrimination and social prejudice against people with disabilities or people who are perceived to be disabled. Ableism characterizes people with disabilities as inferior by situating those who are able-bodied as the norm. Under this belief system, people with disabilities need to be 'fixed' in order to be considered as valued citizens.

**Acadian** - An inhabitant or descendent of Acadie. Acadians are descendants of the French settlers who arrived in Acadie in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Many Acadians were expelled from their lands in the 1750s after the French lost their colony to the British. Those that hid or returned are the ancestors of the Acadians living in Nova Scotia today. Acadians have a unique culture, a distinct French-Acadian dialect and a rich musical culture that lives on today.

**Access** - Having the ability to approach or enter a place. This can also refer to information and having the ability to take in and process this information.

**Access2 card** - A program designed by Easter Seals Canada, where a person requiring assistance can register for the Access2 card. They are then able to show their card at any registered venue to receive a complimentary ticket for their companion when they purchase a ticket for themselves. This program is founded on the understanding that many Disabled people require someone to assist them in meeting their access needs while attending events. For more information on the Access2 program visit: [www.Access2Card.ca](http://www.Access2Card.ca).

**Accessibility consultant** - An individual with lived experience and/or specialized training in the field of accessibility needs. This person will work with your organization to understand your goals and advise how best to meet the accessibility needs of your audience, performers and staff based on where you are in your learning process.

**Access guide** - A document created to outline the ways your organization is working to become more accessible and inclusive and to list the access measures available for that specific event.

**Access measures** - Tools used to provide greater access during a performance.

**Accessibility plan** - A document that outlines the timeline and steps your organization plans to take to better meet the accessibility needs of your audience, performers, and staff. Your accessibility plan should cover the current production while also looking to the future.

**Accessibility video** - A video created to show audience members what to expect when they arrive at the venue. This video will give visual and verbal descriptions of the space as well as provide any warnings of elements or subject matter that may be problematic.

**Accessible washrooms** - A washroom designed to meet the access needs of a person with a physical, visual, or sensory disability. All accessible washrooms should be tested by an accessibility advisory or by several members of the Disability community, following the accessibility guidelines in the building code is not enough.

**Access rider** - A document that outlines all the access needs a performer requires to be met so that you can be comfortable and focus on your art.

**Active listener** - A person trained in a way of listening using verbal and non-verbal messages and responding to that person with the goal of improving mutual understanding. Active listeners will give their full focus and attention to a person and will then confirm the messages they received by repeating them to the speaker. They may sometimes provide further resources if needed.

**AFAB** - An acronym meaning Assigned Female at Birth. This means that when the person was born someone examined their external anatomy and made the judgment that their birth certificate should be marked as female. Note that the sex they were assigned at birth has nothing to do with their gender at all and an AFAB person can identify as any gender.

**Agging art** - A new art movement that examines how we age, how we change over time, and how we can embrace a more authentic version of ourselves over time. These



subjects are explored through various forms of art although the Aging art movement is believed to have begun in the field of photography. Aging art is a social justice movement that questions how we view our bodies, our identities, and challenges long-held beliefs that the aging body should be hidden away. It challenges us to embrace the changes in our bodies and minds over time rather than feeling shame over them.

**Ally (plural allies)** - Someone who supports an individual or group facing alienation or hardship, even though they do not belong to that group themselves.

**Alt-text** - Text that briefly describes an online image. This text is used by blind or partially sighted individuals (who might be using screen readers) to understand what is happening in an image, or by everyone when an image does not load. For more resources to understand alt-text and how it differs from image descriptions visit the Instagram account [@Higher Priestess](#).

**AMAB** - An acronym meaning Assigned Male at Birth. This means that when the person was born someone examined their external anatomy and made the judgment that their birth certificate should be marked as male. Note that the sex they were assigned at birth has nothing to do with their gender at all and an AMAB person can identify as any gender.

**American Sign Language (ASL)** - A visual language that serves as the predominant sign language of Deaf and hard of hearing communities in anglophone Canada (note there are other types of sign language including Maritime Sign Language, used by some here in Nova Scotia). The shape, placement, and movement of the hands as well as facial expressions and body movements all play important parts in conveying information and meaning. ASL has the same linguistic properties as spoken languages, but the grammatical structure and syntax differ from English. Like all languages, ASL grows and changes over time.

**Anti-oppression training** - A form of education that examines an anti-oppressive framework. This means that we recognize the oppression that is built into our systems and institutions and challenge inequalities and injustices that allow one group to dominate over another. Anti-oppression training introduces concepts of power and privilege, while teaching the difference between equity and equality. An anti-oppressive framework allows us to understand our place within these systems, question our

practices, and create new approaches that counter oppression and move us closer to reconciliation and decolonization.

**Appropriation** - A term that refers to taking something that doesn't belong to you and most often refers to an exchange that happens when a dominant group takes or borrows something from a minority group that has historically been exploited or oppressed. This act reinforces stereotypes and contributes to oppression.

**Arts coalition** - A collection of artists that wish to work together toward the common goal of a more equitable arts community, which centers on mutual aid and self-care. This arts coalition will dismantle the barriers placed in front of underrepresented artists and will focus on meeting everyone's needs so that its' members are able to give their full attention to creating art.

A key element in the creation of an equitable arts coalition is that it would be controlled by its' members and would not be beholden to any more powerful organization.

**Arts modalities** - A term referring to the many ways of expressing ourselves artistically. In this report, we give examples of some of the dominant performing arts modalities but there are many more examples that are not listed and are equally valid within this conversation.

**Atheist** - A person who does not believe in the existence of a god or deities.

**Audio description** - There are many different styles, but all are a form of narration or description used to provide information surrounding key visual elements, making it accessible for those who cannot see the content. It is often described as speaking pictorially.

**Black** - A racial and cultural classification based on the person having a highly melanated skin colour.

**Blind or partially sighted** - Blindness refers to a spectrum of vision loss. A person's experience of blindness can range from sight loss which interferes with your daily activities to total blindness. Total blindness does not mean that the person sees nothing at all, some people still see changes in light or a haze. Someone who is partially sighted has partial vision in one or both eyes.

It is common for a blind person to identify with the Disability community as they do not

identify as having their own unique culture and language, but not every blind person will connect with that label.

**CamelCase** - The practice of writing phrases without spaces or punctuation, indicating the separation of words with a single capitalized letter. Used as an access measure when writing hashtags, to allow screen readers to differentiate between words.

**Capitalism** - An economic and political system where the means of production of goods and services are owned and operated by private individuals, with the goal of making a profit.

**Captions** - The text version of audio content in a video, which has been synchronized with the video. Captions are used to make your content more accessible to a variety of users, including those who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing, people learning the language, and for neurodivergent individuals.

**Chronic illness** - A health condition that lasts one year or more, that requires treatment, and may limit daily living activities. Chronic illness is often incurable. Although chronic illness may lead to disability, not everyone with a chronic illness is disabled, and most people with disabilities do not have a chronic illness.

**Cisgendered** - An umbrella term for persons whose gender identity/expression conforms to that typically associated with the gender they were assigned at birth. A person whose gender expression matches the sex that they were assigned at birth. It is disrespectful to use *normal* or *regular* to refer to cisgender folks

**Cis-female (Cisgender-female)** - A person who was assigned female at birth and their gender identity remains female.

**Cis-male (Cisgender-male)** - A person who was assigned male at birth and their gender identity remains male.

**Closed space conversations** - Conversations intended to take place in an environment where only people of a certain identity are invited to participate. Closed space conversations typically happen within groups of underrepresented communities, with the goal of having a space where they can feel safe to share openly without fear of

repercussions and without having to explain basic concepts and ideas which are understood within the community.

**Colonialism** - The practice of domination (often by subjugation) of the people in power over the other people in the area. This often happens by establishing colonies and typically has the goal of economic dominance. Colonizers may impose their language, religion, beliefs, or cultural practices on those with less power.

The strongest example of that in our region would be when the European settlers colonized Turtle Island, stealing the land, resources, culture, and language of the Indigenous people in an act of genocide.

**Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART)** - The live, word for word translation of speech and sound into text, which allows a person who is d/Deaf or hard of hearing, people learning the language, as well as neurodivergent individuals to follow what is being said aloud. CART is a service where a specially trained stenographer listens to what is being said and types it, so it can be read on-screen (also known as real-time stenography). This real-time captioning strives for an accuracy rating of roughly 98%, although the final accuracy is dependent on the caption writer mishearing a word, their familiarity with the words being used, or having errors in the software they are using.

**Communication boards** – A picture symbol board that can be used to facilitate communication. The pictures on the board will enable a person to make comments, requests, or give direction without the need for verbal communication. Communication boards are traditionally used by members of the autism community and by people who are non-verbal, although they have many other uses, such as for individuals who do not speak the language or for patrons with anxiety.

**Community consultants** - Community members with lived experience who are paid to offer knowledge and experience to the organization that hired them. Community consultants will use their knowledge and understanding of their community to guide decision making.

**Companion ticket** - A free ticket offered to the companion of a ticket buyer who requires support to navigate the space and support their needs during the performance.

**Criminalization of our bodies** - There are many ways in which the system criminalizes the bodies of those it deems inferior. Examples of this include: the sexualization of some

nipples as apposed to others (i.e. breastfeeding parents or who is allowed to go topless), a hesitancy to show intimacy between queer couples in our media, using a immigrant's health as a means of deciding whether or not they should be accepted into the country, driving while black and racialized stop-and-frisk policies, the lack of investigation of thousands of missing and murdered Indigenous women, forced do not resuscitate (DNR) policies for disabled people entering the health system for minor ailments, and forced hysterectomies for trans men requesting gender confirmation surgery. All of this is evidence that ugly laws are still very much alive and well today.

**Crip art** - An artistic movement that looks to 'crip' the arts by embracing ways that Disability can disrupt the status quo and create change. Language is often used as a tool to subvert the norms and shock people into thinking about their preconceived notions. The Crip arts as well as Disability arts are used as tools to counter misrepresentation while shifting control back to the Disabled community. Impairment is celebrated as a source of diversity rather than a difference that should cause shame.

**Cultural identity** - The identity or feeling of belonging to a group. It is part of a person's self-perception. It encompasses nationality, ethnicity, religion, language, cuisine, aesthetics, social class, or any other social group with their own distinct identity.

**Deadname** - A term created in the transgender community, which refers to someone's unused birth name. A deadname should never be used, as it does not match the person's gender and personal identity.

**Deaf art** - An art movement that expresses the unique values of Deaf artists. Deaf art has been especially influenced by history, including the negative and oppressive events of the oralist movement. Deaf art represents aspects of Deaf culture, Deaf identity, American Sign Language (ASL), Deaf gain, deafness, hearing loss, oppression, Deaf perspective, Deaf experience, celebration, resistance, and cultural identity. It is separate from the De'VIA (Deaf View/Image Art Movement) although they both act as forms of resistance to the narrow view of the hearing/oratory art world.

**d/Deaf Interpreters** - A d/Deaf interpreter (DI) is an individual who is deaf or hard of hearing and possesses excellent communication skills in both ASL and English. They have been trained in interpreter ethics and may also have specialized communication training in use of gesture, mime, drawings, and matching sentence structure and language of the

deaf person they are interpreting. The DI also has an extensive knowledge and understanding of deafness and of Deaf culture. Some people believe that the use of a d/Deaf & hearing interpreter team increases the level of accuracy in the overall transmission of information.

**d/Deaf or hard of hearing** - d/Deaf is defined as a total or partial hearing loss.

Traditionally the lowercase deaf refers to the audiological condition of having hearing loss, while the capitalized Deaf refers to the community of people who share a culture and language. People who are Deaf take great pride in their unique culture and as a result, many people from the Deaf community do not identify their deafness as a disability, while others do identify as both Deaf and Disabled.

Hard of hearing refers to a person with mild to moderate hearing loss. They may or may not identify with the Deaf community. People in the Deaf, deaf, and hard of hearing communities may or may not use Sign Language to communicate. In the end, it is important not to assume a person's identity and instead ask them their identity and respect it.

Although not used in this report another important identity that exists in the d/Deaf community is that of a CODA. CODA is an acronym for Child of Deaf Adult and typically refers to a hearing person who has a parent or parents who are d/Deaf. This gives them a unique experience in the d/Deaf community.

**Disability** - According to the medical model of understanding disability, a person with a disability is someone who has a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity. This definition focuses on what is lacking in the individual and looks to the system to fix it.

For the purpose of this report, we define Disability through the social model which says: Disability is caused by the way society is organized, rather than by a person's differences. The social model of Disability looks at ways of removing physical, attitudinal, communication, and systemic societal barriers so disabled people can be independent and equal in society, with choice and control over their own lives. Disability is not a personal problem or limitation to be overcome by an individual, but rather a failure of society to be inclusive and accessible.

You may notice that throughout this report Disability was sometimes capitalized and other times it was not. When Disability is capitalized it is an act of reclamation, which acknowledges Disability as a source of diversity that fosters pride, while celebrating that Disabled people have a shared identity, culture, and community. We embrace the strengths that come with being Disabled. When disability is not capitalized it refers to

the medical model definition (or diagnosis) of disability or to a disabled person who chooses not to identify with the label of belonging to the community of Disability. I also chose identity-first language rather than person-first language for this report, as I personally take great pride in belonging to the Disability community and choose to embrace my identity before my personhood. Many people will choose person-first language instead.

**Disability doula (Crip doula)** - A Disability doula is a trained professional who provides continuous physical, emotional, spiritual, and informational support to a person and guides a newly disabled person into our Disability community and culture. Like birth, the transition into the Disability world comes with many changes and feelings of loss of control. The Disability doula teaches the individual how to navigate the complex systems, while introducing them to the concepts of Disability Justice and interdependence. They will also help introduce them to other members of the Disability community.

The word 'Crip' (abbreviation of Cripple) is a reclaimed term that shows pride in the strengths that come with belonging to the Disability movement. The Crip movement uses language to challenge disability stereotypes, avoids disability hierarchy, and espouses the beliefs of the Disability Justice movement.

**Disability Justice** - A movement developed in 2005 by a collective of disabled queer women of color (all part of the Sins Invalid performance company) as a way of establishing civil rights for people with Disabilities. The Sins Invalid catchphrase is, "an unshamed claim to beauty in the face of invisibility".

Disability Justice is the leading Disability rights movement in North America today, and has at its core the 10 Principles of Disability Justice. These principles include intersectionality, leadership of those most impacted, anti-capitalist politics, commitment to cross-movement organizing, recognizing wholeness, sustainability, commitment to cross-disability solidarity, interdependence, collective access, and collective liberation. For more information on Disability Justice visit the Sins Invalid website at: [10 Principles of Disability Justice](#).

**Discrimination** - The unfair or prejudicial treatment of a person based on the group or class that they belong to. This treatment may occur based on race, age, ability, gender, sexuality, or class as a few examples.

Systemic or institutional discrimination also happens. These refer to policies or practices

that appear to be neutral but that have discriminatory effects on individuals based on their identity.

**Drag art** - The art of playing with gender. It is performance art where a person gets to explore and exaggerate various aspects of a gender identity of their choosing.

**Drag artist** - A person who expresses themselves using the art of drag. They may be a person of any gender and they may be exploring using any gender signifiers and gender roles.

**Drag Kings** - A person who uses clothing and makeup to explore and often exaggerate male gender signifiers and gender roles for entertainment purposes. Drag Kings were traditionally females or AFAB, but today anyone can be a Drag King.

**Drag Queens** - A person who uses clothing and makeup to explore and often exaggerate female gender signifiers and gender roles for entertainment purposes. Drag Queens were traditionally males, but today anyone can be a Drag Queen.

**Economic standing** - The economic class a person inhabits. This can be measured by their income, occupation, and education.

**Elder art** - An arts movement that encourages seniors to explore their creativity and to use art as a tool for processing emotion and fostering connections, while maintaining physical ability and mental acuity. These goals promote ongoing active engagement in life while allowing seniors to maintain their voice through art.

**Elders** - An Elder is someone recognised within their community as a keeper of cultural knowledge and are well respected members of an Indigenous community. They lead through example, by living their lives according to deeply ingrained principles, values, and teachings. Although their role varies from one community to the next, Indigenous Elders are deeply committed to sharing their knowledge, providing guidance, teaching others to respect the natural world, and to learning to listen and feel the rhythms of the elements and seasons.

**Ethnicity** - A term that refers to the shared culture or way of life of a group. This shared culture can be marked by its practices, values, beliefs, history, religion, and language.



**Fat art** - A social justice movement that uses art as a tool to challenge the belief that thin esthetics are the norm and that fat esthetics are undesirable. It strives to show beauty, strength and health in 'fatness' and removes stereotypes and social stigmas connected to a larger body type. Fat art also shows the social stigmas and obstacles placed in the way of fat individuals, deemed as unworthy in our society. The Fat art movement has played a role in the fat acceptance and body positivity movements.

**Femme performers** - Femme is used by people who express themselves in a way that is traditionally perceived as "feminine." Femme can be used as either a gender identity or as a gender expression.

In the case of this report, we are referring to AFAB performers who are performing Feminine Drag, meaning the character they play embraces a traditionally feminine gender expression.

**Gender** - Society views gender as the societal expectations (gender roles) put on a person based on the way their body is perceived (either masculine or feminine). Personal gender (what we are referring to in this report) refers to a spectrum of identities that combine or reject ideas of femininity and masculinity. Some cultures recognize a third gender identity outside of the binary of feminine or masculine. A person's gender may fall anywhere along this spectrum or may be completely outside it. Where you situate yourself may change or evolve from day to day or over your lifetime. Gender includes the ways you understand your physical body, the way you experience your inner thoughts, and the ways you express yourself to the outside world. Gender is how we experience ourselves.

**Gendered** - For the purpose of this report gendered refers to having certain attributes, characteristics or expectations assigned to a particular gender.

**Gender expression** - External; how an individual chooses to express their gender to the world around them.

A person may exhibit their gender expression through appearance, style, and behaviour. Please note that although these tools can be used to express gender, they do not necessarily have a specific gender attached to them. Makeup can be worn by a person of any gender. This means that a person's gender identity can sometimes inform a person's gender expression, but a person's perceived gender expression does not dictate their gender identity.

**Gender identity** - Internal; the personal understanding and experience of an individual's own gender. Everyone has a gender identity; for some, it matches the sex they were assigned at birth, while for others they are incongruent.

**Gender inclusive washrooms** - Washrooms that anticipate and accommodate the needs of members of all genders and where individuals of any gender can feel comfortable and safe.

**Genderqueer** - Genderqueer identity is open to anyone who "queers" gender. This means anyone who does things that are outside of the norm of their actual or perceived gender identity.

It can also refer to a gender identity where the person falls outside of, falls in between, or fluctuates along the many gender categories. People who are genderqueer often experience their gender as fluid, meaning it can shift and change at any given time.

**Genocide** - The intentional, systematic destruction of a group of people because of their ethnicity, nationality, religion, or race.

**Gentrified** - The process of changing the character of a community through an influx of more affluent individuals.

**Government supports** - Funds provided to an individual by the government with the intention of allowing them to cover their most basic living expenses. These funds come with strict rules as to how they can be spent and who is deemed worthy of support.

**Hearing Interpreters** - A hearing interpreter is any ASL interpreter who is able to hear. Hearing interpreters may work alone or alongside a d/Deaf interpreter to interpret as a team. Some people believe that the use of a d/Deaf and hearing interpreter team increases the level of accuracy in the overall transmission of information.

**Heteronormative** - The assumption that being cisgender or heterosexual is the norm, and anything that exists outside of that is strange or wrong.

**IBPOC** - An acronym for Indigenous, Black, and People of Color. Please note IBPOC should not be used indiscriminately when actually referring to a single community within. For example, when referencing the high numbers of missing and murdered Indigenous women you would not use IBPOC as not all communities within this group have the same experience.

This acronym was originally BIPOC (which is still used today). For this report, we chose to use IBPOC as a sign of respect to the Indigenous peoples who were the first to inhabit this land.

**Image descriptions** - Detailed explanations of an image that provides textual information to describe visual images to a person who is blind or partially sighted. Image descriptions are longer than the brief alt-text description you would receive if the image did not load. When using Image Descriptions to describe art we can use a little more creativity than with typical image descriptions, and it provides another layer of artistic expression for the artist. For more information on Image descriptions visit the Higher Priestess Instagram account at: [@Higher Priestess](#).

**Inclusion** - The action or state of including or being included and fully welcomed in a group.

**Inclusion rider** - A document that outlines standards of inclusion and education that you require of the organization you are working with.

**Indigenous** - A term referring to the very first people to inhabit the land. In the case of Nova Scotia, this would be the Mi'kmaq people (also known as the L'nu people). Please look under Mi'kmaw for more information.

**Institutionalization** - The process of developing or transforming rules and procedures that influence a set of human interactions within the social system. This institutional system also encourages the incarceration of those deemed unworthy within prisons, juvenile detention centers, community housing co-ops, psychiatric wards, hospitals, and long-term care homes

**Interlocutor** - A person hired to facilitate communication and who works to ensure that both parties feel their needs are being heard and respected.

**Intersections of identity** - Social identities such as gender, race, ethnicity, social class, religion, sexual orientation, and ability overlap with one another and with systems of power within our community. When viewed through the lens of power, oppression, and marginalization these multiple identities overlap and amplify the effects felt by the person. This means that a Disabled Black woman is likely to face discrimination from the Disability community because they do not understand her Black identity.

**Intimacy coordinator** - A person hired to ensure the well-being and comfort of actors who participate in sex scenes or other intimate scenes. The intimacy coordinator facilitates discussions of boundaries before the scene and ensures that they are respected throughout.

***K'jipuktuk*** - The original name given to Halifax by the Mi'kmaq people, as the original caretakers of this land. *K'jipuktuk* means *Great Harbour* and is pronounced 'che-book-took'. It is important to note that this land was never given or purchased but rather it was stolen from the Mi'kmaq people and is still governed by the Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1752.

**Land acknowledgments** - A statement that a non-Indigenous person or visiting Indigenous person gives to recognize and honor the land they are working on and the Indigenous people who are the caretakers of the land. This stems from the tradition of visiting peoples sharing the history of their own land and their lineage as a way of connecting with those they are visiting. It also acknowledges the colonial history that these lands are stolen.

A land acknowledgment is one tool that can be used in the art of reconciliation and decolonization, but it must also be done alongside the work of educating yourself, providing financial support and amplifying the voices of Indigenous peoples.

**Language legend** - A legend that outlines the level of language comprehension a person would need to follow the performance.

**Lived experience** - For this report lived experience refers to an element of a person's identity that they have first-hand knowledge or expertise through years of living with that particular identity. For example, my 20 years as a wheelchair user gives me the lived experience of being a mobility device user.

**Mad arts** - Artistic expression based on the principles of the Mad Pride movement, focusing on the history, identities, and expression of Madness. The Mad Pride movement celebrates the strengths of any mind that does not function in a normative way and creates space for the various experiences of psychological and emotional difference. Mad art is a form of resistance and of social justice.

**Mentorship** - A relationship between two people where the individual with more experience, knowledge, and connections is able to pass along what they have learned to the person with less experience.

**Mi'kmaw** - The Indigenous peoples who inhabit Mi'kma'ki. The Mi'kmaw people are the original caretakers of the land on which we live. They signed the Treaties of Peace and Friendship in 1752 between the Mi'kmaq nation and Britain. This was an agreement meant to govern how the two would live peacefully alongside one another and outline fishing, hunting, and trading rights. Unfortunately, the settlers decided not to honour their agreement and instead have spent the past several hundred years attempting to exterminate the Mi'kmaw people.

The history and culture of the Mi'kmaw people are passed between generations as an oral history told through legends and stories. As a result, the Mi'kmaw have a rich and unique history of music, storytelling, and dance as well as having many talented visual and tactile artists. The population of Mi'kmaq speakers is decreasing with most speakers being the elders of the communities.

**Misgender** - Intentionally or unintentionally using the incorrect pronoun or gender when referring to a person or using language to describe that person that does not align with their affirmed gender.

**Mobility devices** - Assistive devices used to enhance a person's level of mobility. These are tools that add to their quality of life rather than 'binding', 'confining', or 'limiting' them.

**Mutual aid** - An act of solidarity and reciprocity where the members of a voluntary community agree to come together and exchange resources and services and provide care for the mutual benefit of everyone involved. This system of care often happens in underrepresented communities that are not receiving the supports they need in established systems. Mutual aid is founded on the belief that everyone needs support from others and that everyone has something to contribute. Mutual aid can take many

forms with care webs being most common. A care web is made when community members create a voluntary and reciprocal network where each community member provides a resource or service for someone else. Together there is a labyrinth of care created where everyone's basic needs are met by someone else within the community.

**Naloxone kits** - A kit containing Naloxone, which acts as an opioid antagonist, meaning it can be administered during an opioid overdose to temporarily reverse the effects so that treatment can be sought.

**Networking** - The act of meeting people and exchanging ideas with others working within your field, with the purpose of making connections that could lead to artistic collaboration.

**Neurodivergent** - An umbrella term used when someone's brain does not function in a typical or normative way. This used to be seen as an illness or a problem but now our society is starting to realize that these differences come with advantages, allowing them to realize that the person does not need to be fixed. This term is sometimes confused with neurodiversity, which refers to the spectrum of differences in the way our brains function.

Common types of neurodivergence are autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), Tourette syndrome, down syndrome, bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, dyslexia, dyspraxia, epilepsy, depression, and anxiety.

**Newcomers to Turtle Island (Canada)** - For the purpose of this report we defined newcomers to Turtle Island as immigrants or refugees who have arrived in Canada during the last five years. Turtle Island is the Indigenous name for the land settlers have called North America. There are many versions of the creation story of Turtle Island. We encourage you to learn from your local elders their story of the creation of this land. Note that Canada is located on stolen lands and the Canadian government, who currently decides who is welcome and who is not, took power by force and with violence, as they did not have ownership of the land or the right to govern over it. There was extensive discussion during the writing of this report as to whether or not to capitalize Canada. The 'lowercase movement' is rejecting all symbols of hierarchy by not using capitalization except to acknowledge the Indigenous struggle for recognition. Those embracing the movement feel that by capitalizing Canada, you are celebrating a

government that ordered the genocide of thousands of its own people while imprisoning the rest and removing their language.

**Non-binary** - Identifying with a gender between or outside of the gender binary (the normative notion that there are only two genders, that of male or female).

**Non-cisgendered** - An umbrella term for persons whose gender identity/expression does not conform to that typically associated with the gender they were assigned at birth.

**Oppression** - When a person or group in a position of power controls the less powerful in cruel, unjust, and discriminatory ways. These systems of oppression are built on a combination of prejudice and institutional power.

**Othering (Othered)** - The act of labeling someone as different or not fitting in with the norms of the social group. Othering is when you look at someone and conclude that they 'are not like you' or 'are not one of us'. When an individual is othered it fosters discrimination or prejudice. When applied to a group of people it can serve to dehumanize them and is often used as a tool to take away their rights.

**Poverty line** - The estimated minimum level of income required for a person to meet their basic needs.

**Power dynamics** - The unwritten rules navigating how we engage or interact with one another given the various levels of power they are assigned based on their position within a system or organization. This power is not inherently good or bad, but it can be abused by those with more power.

**Priority seating** - A section of seating reserved for those with specific access needs that may not be met in other sections. Priority could be chosen based on sightlines, proximity to the ASL interpreters, or because it is easily accessed by mobility device users and by service animals.

**Privilege** - A right or special advantage granted to some people but not others based on their identity. This is not an advantage that someone asks for but rather society's biases decide that one person is good, and the other is bad based on a single characteristic. They then reward this goodness with benefits or punish those with the undesirable

identity. Often privilege is rewarded with not having to consider the discrimination other groups face every day. For example, my white privilege means I do not have to worry about being murdered when I am stopped by a police officer.

**Pronouns** - Pronouns are one of the most recognized ways in which people identify their gender and how they want to be referred to. The most recognized pronouns are they/them, she/her, and he/him but these are only a few examples. Outside of these commonly used pronouns, there are also neopronouns and some people choose to create their own pronouns to suit their personal identity. If you want to learn more do your research or try out the Pronoun Dressing Room online.

Pronouns are important to respect, but they do not necessarily tell you a person's gender identity. A person who uses she/her pronouns may be non-binary or someone using he/they pronouns could identify in many different ways. If you are unclear about a person's pronouns, ask them and then make a conscious effort to learn and use them.

**Queer** - To be queer is to exist in a way that may not align with heterosexual or homosexual norms. Although it's typically used to describe a person's sexual orientation, it can also be used to express a nonbinary gender identity.

Although historically used in a derogatory word to attack gay or lesbian people, Queer has now been reclaimed and used with pride to celebrate one's strengths and uniqueness as a non-heteronormative individual or community.

**Queer art** - An umbrella term for any art that draws on 2SLGBTQIA+ imagery or issues. Queer art is a form of resistance to society's rigid norms around gender, sex, and sexuality. The art itself may examine subjects of queerness or it may simply be queer art because it was created by a queer artist.

**Race** - A categorization where humans are divided into groups based on physical traits regarded as common among people of shared ancestry.

**Racism (racist)** - The prejudice, discrimination, and hatred of people of color based on the incorrect assumption that they inherit distinct characteristics and abilities that distinguish them as inferior, and the socially constructed racial hierarchy that privileges white people.

**Relaxed performances** - A performance adapted to suit the needs of those who prefer a more relaxed performance style. This includes an invitation to move around freely and



vocalise as needed. Sound cues are lowered, house lights are raised, and there are warnings provided for any sudden or startling actions. There is also a sensory or calm room and advanced introductions to actors and their characters.

**Runtime** - The length of time a performance runs from start to finish. The runtime includes any breaks, but we suggest letting patrons know when the scheduled breaks will take place during the show.

**Sanism (sanist)** - An irrational prejudice against people with mental illness or other forms of neurodivergence. A belief that those with neurodivergent minds are inferior to those with neurotypical minds. Also known as 'mental health discrimination' or 'mental health stigma'.

**Self-care** - The practice of taking an active role in the process of taking care of one's well-being, physical, mental, and emotional health.

**Sensory kits** - A kit made up of items that can be used to calm a person when they are in a state of sensory overload. This may also be known as 'stim kits' and 'stim toys' (abbreviation for stimulation).

**Sensory overload** - A state of excitation, where one or more of your senses takes in more information from your environment than your brain can process, leading to over-stimulation. This may appear as frustration or be read as an outburst. Using sensory toys can help calm a person when in a state of sensory overload.

**Sensory room (Calm room)** - A room designed to diminish the amount of sensory input a person is taking in. A person can visit the room when they are feeling sensory overload or to prevent themselves from reaching the point of sensory overload. Sensory rooms have lower lighting, less background noise, comfortable places to sit, and provide sensory kits which can be used to calm the person's mind.

**Service animal** - An animal who has undergone specialised training in order to perform specific tasks that support the disabled person they are assisting.

**Sexism (sexist)** - Discrimination, prejudice, or devaluation based on a person's sex or gender. It is linked to stereotypes and gender roles and includes the belief that one sex or gender is intrinsically superior to all others.

**Sexuality** - The ways in which a person or people experience or express themselves sexually. This can encompass gender and sexual expression (outward expression of self), gender and sexual identity (inward understanding), kink practices, etc.

**Sharps container** - A hard plastic container that is used to safely dispose of hypodermic needles and other sharp medical instruments.

**Sighted guides** - A person with specialized training who can safely guide a blind or partially sighted person through an unknown environment. They use both physical guiding techniques as well as verbal description of where an item is situated when the team is standing still.

**Smudging** - An Indigenous traditional spiritual ceremony for purifying or cleansing the soul of a person or space. Smudging involves four elements: the first element is typically a shell (representing water), the second is the sacred plant, white sage (representing Mother Earth), the third element is the fire, and the fourth element is the smoke (representing air).

**Social class** - A grouping of people within society who have similar socio-cultural aspects to their life. Some examples are the lifestyle, behaviors, and knowledge that a person is socialized to adopt in their formative years.

**Stigmatizing** - To treat someone unfairly and to mark them with shame or to discredit them based on a perceived assumption connected to some element of their identity.

**Support animal** - A therapeutic animal that provides emotional support, comfort, and aid to individuals through companionship. These animals assist their humans by relieving loneliness, benefit those with anxiety and depression, and support those living with phobias, but they do not have specialized training to perform tasks.

**Systemic racial discrimination** - Systems and structures that have procedures or processes that disadvantage people based on their race.

**Tokenization** - The practice of making only a perfunctory or symbolic attempt to be inclusive of underrepresented groups by recruiting a person from a minority group

without making the effort to educate yourself. Including a single member of the group to give the appearance of equality.

**Transcripts** - A text version of all spoken dialogue, lyrics, and any non-speech audio information, so that the written copy can be followed along with the live action. Transcripts should be available in hard copy when possible and should be shared in PDF format and in a text only Word Doc format.

**Transgender (Trans)** - An umbrella term for persons whose gender identity/expression does not conform to that typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. A person who identifies with a sex other than the one assigned at birth. The term transgender refers to people whose gender identity (the sense of gender that every person feels inside) or gender expression is different from the sex that was assigned to them at birth. At some point in their lives, transgender people decide they must live their lives as the gender they have always known themselves to be, and often transition to living as that gender.

**Two-Spirit** - A term used within Indigenous communities that encompasses cultural, spiritual, sexual and gender identities. The term reflects the complex understanding of gender roles and spirituality in Indigenous culture. Two-Spirit people embrace both their feminine and masculine spirit and were considered blessed by the creator to be able to see through the eyes of both genders, as well as being known in some tribes as the balance keepers. They were often entrusted with honoured roles as healers and counselors within their community. When colonialism arrived transphobia and homophobia forced Two-Spirit people to hide but in recent years they are starting to re-emerge and are once again finding their place of honour as leaders and caretakers in Indigenous community.

**Underrepresented artists** - Any artist whose identity lacks representation in their art form. Underrepresented artists often face discrimination and systemic barriers to success. Underrepresented artists are required to do additional work to reach the same milestones as the average artist without that same identity.

**Underrepresented communities** - A group that is a subset of the population that does not have equal rights or privileges as the greater population.

**Vibrotactile arts** - A style of art that implements the perception of vibration through touch. Vibrotactile perception can be used either as an accessibility measure as a substitute for other senses or to enhance the information provided through your other senses.

**Video descriptions** - An auditory description of visual elements and the action in a video so that those who are blind or partially sighted can follow the action as it happens. These descriptions are interspersed amongst any dialogue happening in the video.

**Visual description** - An auditory self-description of your appearance and the clothing you are wearing, given when you first begin speaking (during a meeting or for any online content) so that those who are blind or partially sighted have an understand of what you look like. Elements to include may be your gender, approximate age, hair colour and length, skin tone, eye color, facial shape, a description of the clothing and glasses you are wearing, and any important elements from your background. You do not have to describe all these elements, but it is important to describe elements that are meaningful to your identity.

**Visual storytelling** - A story told primarily through visual elements, using a series of messages like graphics, images, pictures, or videos. Visual storytelling is an additional tool which can be used to describe the story of your performance to your audience. This tool reduces your reliance on language comprehension and allows you to be more creative in your storytelling.

**White-supremacy** - The historically held, institutionally perpetuated, racist belief that white people are inherently superior to other races and deserve to dominate them. This term refers to political and socio-economic systems where white people enjoy structural advantages and rights that other racial and ethnic groups do not.

**Work-in-progress** - Work that is not fully developed or has not reached the creator's end goal.

**Workshopping** - Presenting a performance of a creative idea, using group discussion and improvisation to flesh out and test aspects of the production before a formal staging.