



whynot

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**space project:
2019 pilot summary**

Why Not Theatre has achieved unprecedented growth over the last three years. As a result, we have been advised to purchase a space. Historically an art organization's ability to grow is linked to capital investment in a physical space.

After much thought and consideration we chose not to pursue this traditional model. Instead, we asked ourselves, is there a better way to support artists to make more - and better - art? What if instead of investing in an expensive, purpose-built facility, we repurposed the city's underutilized space that already exists? **What if the city was our theatre?**



what if space was free for all artists?

As real estate becomes increasingly expensive, cultural spaces become harder to afford. With the Space Project, we aim to provide greater access to space for artists who need it most. Through unique cross-sector partnerships we activate space that is temporarily underutilized across the city of Toronto for cultural use.

Acting as a broker, connecting artists to property managers and community leaders, we're seeking to find a sustainable method of offering space to artists free-of-charge for their creative practices.

Having completed Phase One of our pilot, we have measured the impact of the Space Project, both on artists and the communities they engage, and are working towards the next phase of the project's evolution.



research for phase one

In 2018, we hosted a gathering called ThisGen which brought together 30 independent theatre actors, writers, administrators and directors from across Canada with the aim of designing pilot projects that promote a more equitable distribution of resources across the sector. From this event we identified space as a major barrier for theatre creators.

In 2019, we hosted a cross-sector industry event to gather further insight from those working to solve the issue of space in the city. This event featured a wide array of stakeholders from arts organizations, government, education, religious institutions, real estate, and other non-profit organizations. What we learned allowed us to address potential opportunities, barriers, other similar models, and strategies for measuring the project's impact.

Afterward, we contacted a long list of artists and potential venue partners - including city policy makers, building owners, and community leaders - as we moved towards Phase One of our pilot.



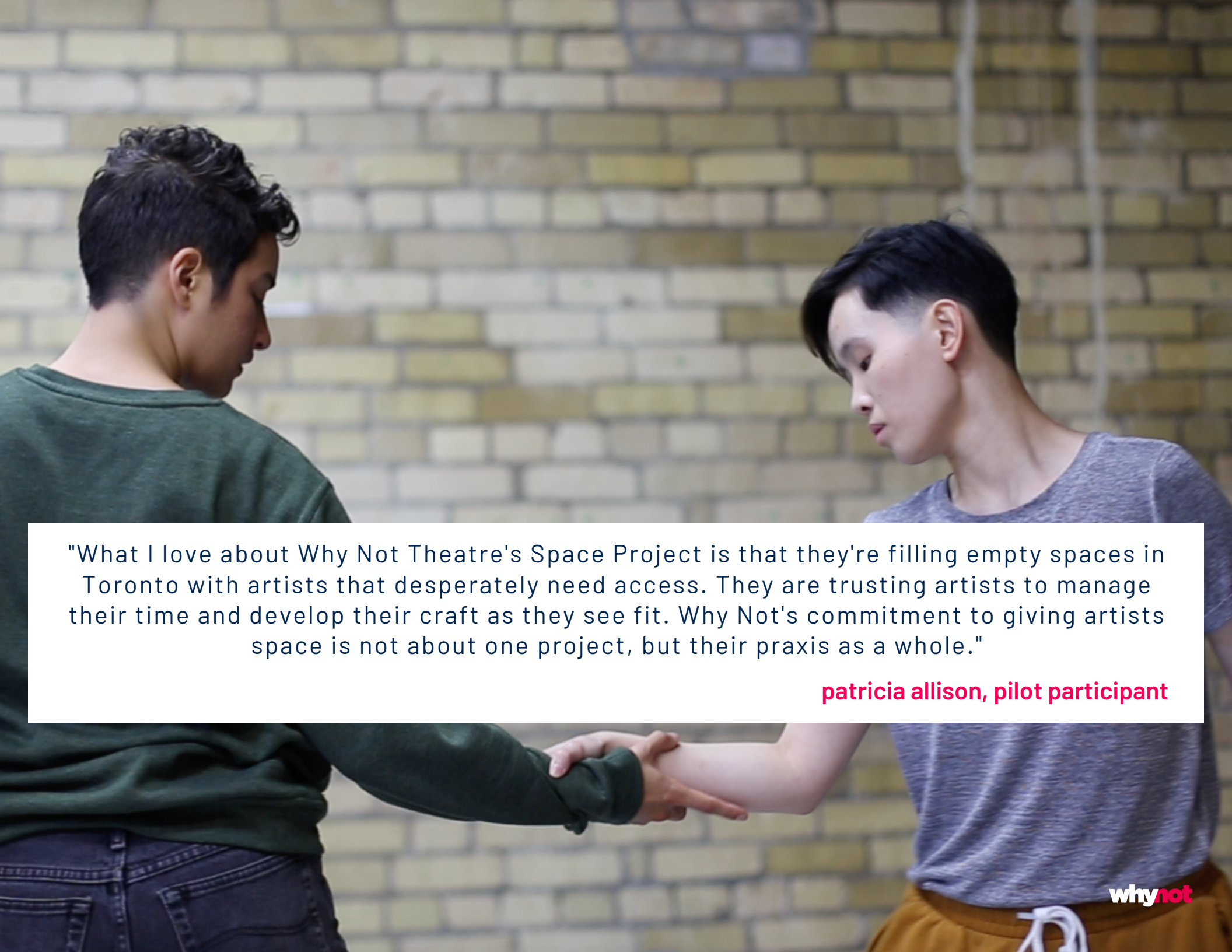


designing pilot

Through our research consultations and meetings with prospective partners, we established three venues for the 2019 pilot.

Our aim was to test three different types of spaces for Phase One - public, non-profit, and private - to help identify the opportunities and barriers with each type of space.

Phase One ran from October-December, 2019. During this time, we acted as a broker between the artists and the venue partners, providing various artists access to space free-of-charge.



"What I love about Why Not Theatre's Space Project is that they're filling empty spaces in Toronto with artists that desperately need access. They are trusting artists to manage their time and develop their craft as they see fit. Why Not's commitment to giving artists space is not about one project, but their praxis as a whole."

patricia allison, pilot participant

establishing partnerships



public

We met with various city officials and agencies, seeking to shift the typical City of Toronto leasing policy to accommodate for short-term tenancy.

Economic Development & Culture (City of Toronto)

- supported the 2019 pilot with seed grant money
- sought to test the model with three types of spaces (public, private, community)

CreateTO (City of Toronto)

- manages the City's real estate (8,000+ properties)
- five-year lease minimums for community spaces
- in discussion to consider "meanwhile" lease model

Parks, Forestry, and Recreation (City of Toronto)

- offered to find spaces in their portfolio that could be viable for the pilot
- the City's Real Estate division prevented leasing below market rates.

Deputy Mayor Ana Bailão

- suggested partnerships with multi-cultural community centres in Ward 9 - Davenport
- on the board of CreateTO; we are hoping that the Deputy Mayor will help pursue opportunities with them

Councillor Paula Fletcher

- could not identify potential spaces
- encouraged us to update them if we identified viable spaces in Ward 14 - Toronto-Danforth

non-profit

We met with community leaders city-wide to find new ways to activate their spaces.

Multicultural Community Centres

- introduced to the Casa Do Alentejo Community Centre leadership through Deputy Mayor Bailão, who has identified at least six other viable community centres
- looking to better animate their events space, which is used primarily on weekends

United Church of Canada

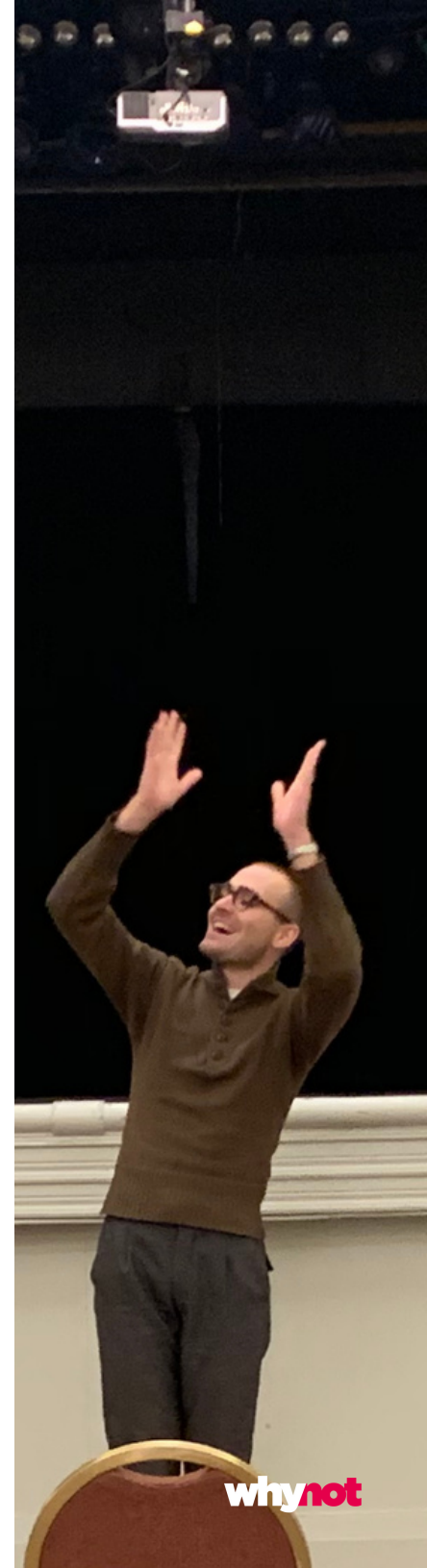
- admin team at Our Better Selves connected us with Eglinton St. George's United Church, who were looking to find more sustainable ways of using their newly-renovated venue
- approached by Fairlawn United Church in the hopes of activating their Sanctuary, which was in use only on weekends for religious practices
- the United Church's EDGE program connected us with East End United Church, which was unable to offer us access to their space due to regular community access

The University of Toronto's School of Cities

- invited us to a Mixed-Space event with cross-sector property managers
- connected with New Commons Development, a development company that works with non-profit organizations looking to animate their spaces
- connected with Sidewalk Labs who were interested in learning more about the project

Arts Non-Profits

- connected with MOCA who were hoping to attract tenants for their third floor lobby, however operating costs are too high and requires significant infrastructure
- the Harbourfront Centre identified 245 Queens Quay West as a potential venue, but the operating costs were prohibitive





private

We met with real estate developers and management companies to find innovative ways of using underused commercial spaces.

Crestpoint Real Estate Investments Ltd.

- donated downtown studio space (valued at \$4,200/month) for the pilot, to test the model and scalability
- has a large real estate portfolio, meaning they could be a significant partner as we scale the model

Peter Venetas (independent consultant)

- site-visit of a Quadrial space at Commerce Court, with potential availability for November 2019
- space required participants to do public site activation
- we did not use this space, but Peter identified other future opportunities

Stackt

- site-visit of a 1000-square-foot studio
- space required participants to do public site activation and program sponsorship
- partnership was ultimately not viable

"We are very happy with our partnership with Why Not Theatre in this innovative endeavour. We are able to leverage our real estate portfolio at Crestpoint to support artists in the buildings and neighbourhoods where we are invested. We believe there's a tangible benefit to the artists, to our tenants and ultimately to the City of Toronto."

max rosenfeld, crestpoint real estate investment ltd.



running pilot

established partnerships



crestpoint (private)

- donated space at 215 Spadina Ave
- 800-square-foot basement studio
- exclusive use (24/7)
- three-month meanwhile lease (with 30-day eviction clause)

esg united (non-profit)

- donated space at Eglinton St. George's United Church
- 3,200-square-foot gymnasium
- available for limited rehearsals, booked weekly

alentejo (non-profit)

- discounted space at Casa do Alentejo Community Centre
- 2,700-square-foot events hall available most weekdays
- reduced monthly rate of \$500



pilot statistics

2.4k+

2,452 hours of free space provided to artists for their practices.

From savings accrued, artists allocated funds to increased artist fees (63%) and production expenses (27%).

50+

51 individual artists supported in the pilot.

54% of participants used space for rehearsals, 54% for development of new work, and 9% for film development.

\$20k+

The market rate of the space offered to artists was \$21,030.

This means that we accessed space for artists that was valued at an average rate of \$8.58/hour.

>\$10k

\$9,021 spent on costs of pilot, including rentals, facility expenses, and staff hours (minus research).

This means that we were able to access spaces for artists at a rate of \$3.68/hour.

pilot participant feedback

need

100% of participants indicated that:

- the pilot was useful for their artistic practice
- finding space in Toronto is challenging
- they want to participate in the program in the future

pros

Participants listed benefits of spaces provided:

- exclusive use (flexibility, freedom, privacy)
- storage space (ease & accessibility)
- large spaces with open floor space

cons

Participants listed limits of spaces provided:

- poor floor quality
- small and/or obstructed playing space
- no Wi-Fi
- no natural light
- lack of privacy
- inaccessible by transit

who

When participants were asked to self-identify:

- 73% were between ages of 25-34
- 46% earned >\$30k/ year
- 65% were female or non-binary
- 59% were BIPOC
- 55% were Queer



"As a cultural hub that has served the Portuguese community for over 36 years, we know the benefits that come from having dedicated cultural space. We are proud to be supporting Why Not Theatre's Space Project by housing artists at Casa do Alentejo for their creative endeavours."

carlos de sousa, casa do alentejo community centre

assessment

partnerships

Crestpoint Real Estate Investment Ltd.

- simplest and most successful partnership
- exclusivity made for ideal scenario (e.g. flexibility for participant schedules, no other stakeholders to consider)
- minor operations to consider (e.g. cleaning, supplies)
- 215 Spadina is no longer available, but Crestpoint has identified other spaces for 2020
- may continue to offer meanwhile space at reduced cost, as available, if tax receipts are provided for their investors

Casa do Alentejo Community Centre

- promising partnership with unique challenges
- large, beautiful space at highly discounted rate
- privacy issues (e.g. disruption from community members and staff)
- other stakeholders to consider (e.g. respecting the community's ownership, setting boundaries for participants)
- navigating a volunteer-run organization (e.g. slow communication, last-minute schedule changes)

Eglinton St. George's United Church

- this church was not a viable partnership
- high demand (e.g. limited availability, not appropriate for available for prolonged rehearsal periods)
- accessibility issues (e.g. transit, not wheelchair accessible)
- not a fully private space



artists

We were able to offer significant in-kind support to the 51 artists in our pilot. While the first phase of the pilot was a success, helping to establish the groundwork of the project in the future, we did identify some barriers to consider moving forward:

- artist reliability, specifically regarding last-minute schedule changes, no-shows, and reduced hours (suggests that the program is unreliable to community partners)
- artist selection, specifically supporting artists outside of the downtown core

In future we will implement a cost/penalty to ensure that artists value the space appropriately, such as:

- offering space at highly discounted rates rather than free
- taking refundable security deposits
- cancelling future bookings if 48-hour notice is not given prior to a cancellation

We will also develop an artist selection process in the future that will be fair, transparent, and ensure prioritizing access to space to underrepresented artists who need it most.





"Participating in Why Not Theatre's Space Project was vital for the development of my newest work. Why Not provided me and my team with much needed access to a studio that was private and flexible. It's getting hard to find a decent rehearsal space in Toronto nowadays, so the idea of opening up those possibilities is really exciting."

bilal baig, pilot participant

moving forward

partnership development

Real Estate Investment & Development Companies

Strong potential partners with large real estate portfolios, often sitting empty momentarily between leases. The viability of these types of partnerships increases if we can create a tax incentive for companies to donate their unused space on a meanwhile lease basis and demonstrate the benefit of activating space that would otherwise be empty during the time between tenants.

Multicultural Community Centres

Good potential partners with large event spaces that are used primarily on weekends. However, they come with unique challenges (community integration, slower communication channels) and require more time overall.

United Churches

More challenging as partners as they are stuck with undesirable infrastructure (e.g. pews) or are newly renovated and are thus in high demand. We will continue to research other options, as there is a desire within the Church to activate their dormant spaces.

City Spaces

Remain a unique challenge from a bureaucratic perspective, as there are rigid structures in place for accessing City-owned spaces. However, we will continue to work to find innovative solutions to access these spaces.



phase two

Funding

- already secured funding partnerships with the Toronto Arts Council (through the Open Door program) and the Canada Council for the Arts (through the Sector Innovation and Development program)
- begin conversations with Canadian Heritage Cultural Spaces Fund

Securing Partnerships

- secure six spaces
- crestpoint: seek additional opportunities of varying size, building type, and in different parts of the City
- community centres: continue relationship with Casa do Alentejo, and work with Deputy Mayor Bailão to secure at two new partnerships with community centres



Artist Outreach & Staff Hiring

- outreach to artists in the communities surrounding the acquired spaces
- create system for artist intake that is transparent, and equitable
- search for and hire an Operations Coordinator to run facilities operations

Artist Selection & Venue Assignments

- select participants for Phase Two
- work with Operations Coordinator to assign venues to artists
- execution of pilot logistics

Evaluation

- monitor ongoing operations and partnerships
- record key findings

long-term goals

Lobby City for "Meanwhile" Lease Policy

Working with CreateTO, Deputy Mayor Bailão, and the City's Economic Development & Culture division to pioneer a meanwhile lease model for 2021.

Address Gaps in Funding

Working with Canadian Heritage's Cultural Spaces Fund, which currently only funds building or renovating spaces, to find new funding models for accessing unused spaces.

Test Large Scale Spaces

Testing the feasibility of extra-large spaces as temporary community hubs and the logistics involved, including temporary infrastructure.

National Market Research

Beginning market research for the project in other major Canadian cities, including Vancouver and Edmonton (in which Why Not is already looking to expand another initiative, RISER Project, for 2021).

Continue Research for Potential Partnerships

We will continue conversations with Peter Venetas about potential venues in his portfolio. Recent conversations with New Commons Development could identify other United Churches looking for site activations. And we will reconnect with Fairlawn United Church to see if a partnership can be viable for Phase Two of the pilot.





"Artists are among the working poor in Toronto. Every year more and more artists are being driven out of the city by the rising cost of living. Yet their contribution to our city is vital. Artists reignite neighbourhoods, boost economic growth, and make Toronto a more communal and livable place.

As we continue to grow and develop Toronto, we are starving out the very people who make the city great. Why Not wants to find ways to change that, to value these artists by finding cheaper, more innovative, and more sustainable ways to support them.

Giving artists access to free creative space will promote the creation of more art, yes, but more importantly, it will help to ensure that these artists continue making art in the city, and not somewhere else."

ravi jain, artistic and general director

about us

why not theatre

We are a Toronto-based theatre company that shakes up the status quo to make the world we want to see. Questioning everything. Rethinking how stories are told. And who gets to tell them.

We are redefining what a theatre company can be.

We are grounded in innovation, community, and collaboration. These are the values that define how we create and impact change.

Founded in 2007, Why Not is led by the core team of Artistic and General Director Ravi Jain, Managing Director Owais Lightwala, and Executive Producer Kelly Read.

**we make things,
better.**



what we do



we make great art.

Performances that take chances and bring new ideas to life. Plays that reflect today's stories, faces, and voices. We make it engaging and tour it all over the world.



we share everything.

We democratize theatre and welcome more artists. We share resources and create new models to help artists overcome barriers to make and tour their work.



we provoke change.

We take on systemic challenges and remove barriers, for audiences and for artists. To make a greater impact on the world around us. And it's working.

with the help of



Canada Council
for the Arts
Conseil des arts
du Canada



Foundation



THE
READY
COMMITMENT



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
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state of the arts partners

Deb Barrett & Jim Leech
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level up partners

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why not partners

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