

THISGEN 2018

Workshop
Summary
Report



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INTRODUCTION

On August 12, 2018, approximately 30 independent theatre artists (ITAs) and staff of operating companies from across Canada met at the Toronto Media Arts Centre for ThisGen 2018, a conversation about the state of independent theatre in Canada hosted by Why Not Theatre. Financial assistance was provided by the Canada Council for the Arts and the venue, logistics, and outreach support was provided by SummerWorks Performance Festival. Using input from these facilitated and reported conversations, Why Not intends to design a pilot project that promotes a more equitable distribution of resources across the sector. Divided into four smaller groups, the artists participated in both morning and afternoon sessions, hosted by representatives of Why Not Theatre and

facilitated by the Dept of Words & Deeds, the public engagement firm contracted for the event. Participants received honorariums in exchange for their time and input.

Participants included actors, directors, producers, writers, administrators, and more. Though the designation “independent” can be amorphous in its application, for the purpose of this report ITAs will refer to creative theatre professionals who are responsible for securing their own funding for projects and do not benefit from administrative support from a large institution. The staff and administrators that were consulted represent what will be referred to as operating companies. These theatre companies have an operating budget of under \$5 million annually.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The independent theatre sector in Toronto has consistently struggled with being under-resourced. There is a vast supply of talent and desire but not enough opportunities and resources to get the work produced in an increasingly unaffordable city. ITAs need innovative and flexible supports to help make more and better work to fill the gap and audience demand. Though there is no way to prove it demonstrably, it is a commonly held view by members of the community that ITAs take more risks with their work, creating space for a multiplicity of voices, and frequently push and challenge traditional forms. Participants at ThisGen 2018 recommended that the following goals and objectives be reflected in a new set of priorities and supports for independent theatre:

- Enhanced understanding of the motivations of artists to 'stay independent'
- Greater flexibility in funding applications and processes
- Enhanced theatre-making skills courses and professional training
- More supports and models for innovative collaborations and partnerships
- More expansive understandings of inclusion, diversity and accessibility with relation to making work, not just audience outreach
- Deeper understanding of the frameworks and systems that reproduce inequity
- Enhanced financial supports and resources for the chronically precariously employed ITAs
- Greater recognition for the heavy-lifting ITAs do in developing new talent, works and audiences

This report summarizes the detailed input into the following sections:

1. Policy Directions
2. Independent Values in Action
3. Financial Frameworks
4. The Artists and Operators Ecosystem
5. Resource Sharing
6. Making A Living, Living is Making
7. Shift Priorities, Increase Participation

1. POLICY DIRECTIONS

Using the input from the ITAs and operating companies in attendance, Why Not is well positioned to implement a pilot project that could make a dramatic difference in the lives of theatre makers in Toronto. Part of the discussions that took place at ThisGen focused on more substantive long-term goals and objectives that need to be addressed. But there were also plenty of suggestions for constructive, pragmatic ways in which supports and resources could be directed in the short term to preserve and promote a healthy independent theatre ecosystem and economy.

Participants suggested the following policy directions, the rationale for which will be elaborated upon in the sections that follow:

BUILD ON WHAT IS WORKING ALREADY

Why Not and Generator are a couple examples of groups that are already working to address these exact issues in the community. Instead of starting from scratch, their efforts should be amplified and expanded.

PAID TRAINING PROGRAMS

“*We need paid training programs because that says, we acknowledge your time to be here and this a professional skill set.*”

A RE-EMERGING GRANT

A funding stream for people who are coming back to their careers after a significant life change or event.

A HEALTH, RECOVERY AND BEREAVEMENT FUND

For people seeking support in dealing with health and recovery issues

A FUND FOR QUIET INCUBATION

Money to be made available for the crucial but quiet work of incubation instead of executing arts projects

“*With additional funding I would prioritize quiet; which means compensating artists for all that time to support incubation time; feeding people and travel expenses.*”

MENTORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR EMERGING ARTISTS

“*We need to support artists to build relationships with new artists to groom, bridging the gap between emerging and established artist.*”

SHARED RESOURCES FOR INDEPENDENT ARTISTS TO ACCESS EXPERTISE

“*We need a central brain where everyone can access information.*”

There was support for the Generator program as a funding model, to share information and experience widely.

PRODUCER SUPPORT

Establish resources and funds for training and supporting independent theatre producers.

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

Establish a residency model for artists that includes a place to live - and make work.

PEER REVIEW

The importance of peer review was deemed critical to the success of any new funding pilots.

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Artists are interested in sitting on boards and juries. We need a seat at the table.

AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS

“

We need to start thinking about real outreach. Hiring an outreach staff member would be important in reaching a wider audience.



2. INDEPENDENT VALUES IN ACTION

The ITAs and operators at the workshop reflect a diverse array of experiences and backgrounds. Despite these differences, they share substantive values that inform and define their work and aspirations. They take risks, they seek out challenge, they are inventive in how work gets made and staged and most of all, they revel in new ideas, stories and methods. These distinct qualities and priorities mark them apart from the conventions of theatre-making at the major operating company level. More importantly, ITAs expand the appeal and relevance of theatre by delivering meaningful performances and plays with and for underserved and often hard to reach populations.

INDEPENDENT ARTISTS PUSH BOUNDARIES

“*Being independent means making a marginalized form of work, establishing the scope of what can be considered theatre.*”

Participants agreed that an important part of their task is to push the boundaries of the form and function of theatre being produced. ITAs approach their work with an eye to making change, innovating, having something new, surprising or different to add to the discourse and practice of performance. This may take the form of creative takes on old, established works, or completely new methods and material. ITAs also tend to experiment more actively with art forms previously considered marginal, like puppetry and mime, which are currently gaining popularity in the mainstream. This experimental work explodes genres and helps the industry to expand and encompass more types of performance.

INDEPENDENT ARTISTS GROW NEW AUDIENCES

“*Audience development is community development*”

“*Success to me is thinking about your audience right from the beginning. I want to spend money on imagining audiences beyond what we normally assume. I want to reach audiences who will respond to work in ways I can't expect. Or audiences that I can't expect would even show up. That's when something hugely unexpected and wonderful happens.*”

“*Audiences inform the process of work that I've done with disabled theatre companies. Involving audiences with different abilities inform the creative process. Audience and accessibility is a design element, not an add on.*”

“*The director of the Arts Council of England was surprised that there was genre of "community arts" in Canada, because, as she said, 'isn't it all community arts?' There, every organization who gets funding has to have a level of community engagement that doesn't exist across the board here. There has to be a connection to community that you're creating for. There's always a conversation, a workshop, something the community gives to the production in some way.*”

Participants spoke enthusiastically about accepting the responsibility of pushing boundaries in terms of who they create for. While

large theatre institutions have accountability to their boards and donors, ITAs feel accountable to their communities. Instead of producing work that maximizes ticket sales, ITAs produce work that maximize impact in the community.

One part of this is diversifying theatre audiences. Many marginalized groups don't see a place for themselves in mainstream Canadian theatre for several reasons including lack of representation in the stories being told, prohibitive ticket prices and the location of performance spaces. ITAs try to speak to these groups in their language, telling their stories and meeting them where they are. This work brings more people to the theatre than would otherwise go, thereby expanding the public's appetite for theatre.

An independent theatre company producing a play for children wanted to increase participation of blind children with their show. This company went to schools for blind children and engaged them with prop-making. In reaching out to this community for the purpose of audience development, there was an even greater impact for blind youth than just attending a show - they now are included in making theatre. There's a place for them here.

INDEPENDENT ARTISTS MAKE SPACE FOR DIFFERENCE

“*To grow I need to work.*”

“*Artists have to educate the public about their own diversity.*”

“*I want to do something different than what is available, so I create work that I wouldn't be able to find elsewhere.*”

Workshop participants felt that as ITAs they were responsible for carving out a space for their own development as artists when that space does not

exist in the mainstream. When large institutions neglect stories and roles for diverse artists, ITAs create their own opportunities. In this way, ITAs elevate themselves and their communities above what is being offered to them.

INDEPENDENT ARTISTS MAKE ENDS MEET IN A VARIETY OF WAYS

“*Working class artists are perpetual guests in their own work; you are never in a situation where you feel stable; I understand that role now, I know that my work has a limited run before I need to be on to the next thing.*”

“*Knowing what the cost of living is and the wages for theatre artists, even if institutions picked up everything you made, it still wouldn't be enough to survive.*”

“*I have made my living as an artist for 22 years, mostly as an artist. I'm finding it harder now than ever before despite being someone who's supposed to know what he's doing and is slightly better known. I'd like to continue make a living from art because as a creator, the administrative stuff takes time, and if I get another job, I know I won't be able to keep up with those things.*”

Despite making enormous and profound contributions to the theatre world, ITAs voiced a concern that their work and vocation was unceasingly precarious. Very few participants said they could make a living making art, performing and collaborating. Almost all ITAs have part or full time jobs (side-hustles) to support their art making, demonstrating considerable resilience and resourcefulness. There was however a diversity of opinion about whether making a living from art-making was ideal or desirable. Some said that having jobs outside of art-making is draining and saps them of creative energy and initiative - they want full time employment in the world of theatre-making. Others said they prefer to make ends meet with non-theatre related side-

hustles that are not too physically or mentally taxing so they have energy for art-making at the end of the day. This topic is discussed in more detail below in the section - Making A Living, Living is Making

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Having other jobs outside theatre divides concentration from the art and keeps me from doing my best work.

What ITAs will consistently point to is the frustration, uncertainty and strain of making art and making a living in a place as unaffordable as Toronto. Making ends meet is requiring too much creativity and compromise which in turn affects the quality and quantity of work that ITAs can create. A greater range of financial frameworks and strategies are needed to suit personal preferences and situations.



3. FINANCIAL FRAMEWORKS

“*The current funding models stifle innovation and keep artists from exploring new ground.*”

“*I left Canada because I couldn't work here, I couldn't make a living. I can overseas where there is more government support. I've been back for eight months and there's a real question mark as to whether I will be able to stay.*”

“*The barriers are as infinite as the possibilities.*”

According to the participants at the workshop, ITAs are confronting increasing financial barriers in making their art. This is the result of a complex set of reasons including a funding system that participants felt does not distribute money equitably and the rising costs of living in major cities like Toronto and Vancouver.

Participants discussed how the independent theatre scene operates financially and pointed to places where inequity could be mitigated and funding mechanisms made more accessible. Participants felt strongly that if the financial frameworks were to shift, more and better independent theatre work would be made and seen. As a corollary, participants noted that maintaining the status quo would keep the current framework in place and hinder the emergence of new artists and audiences.

GOVERNMENT GRANTING SYSTEMS

Participants felt that the present funding model had many shortcomings that resulted in the inequitable distribution of funds throughout the sector. While overhauling the grant system is not the focus of this discussion, input on this subject

will be used to consider the scope, shape and operation of Why Not pilots and programs.

a) Application Process and Timing

“*The art of funding is not often taught, there is a disconnect for emerging indie artists to learn this skill.*”

Many felt that the process of applying for government arts funding is incompatible with the creative process. Arbitrary deadlines and long waiting periods to hear if your application has been accepted mean that ITAs can't work when they're inspired. There are models in other countries that address this problem, including in the UK where funding applications can be submitted at any time and are processed in six weeks.

Many ITAs reported feeling frustrated or confused by grant applications adding that they wanted to learn specific skills and strategies to fill them in and be successful. It was also noted that written applications do not always play to the strengths of the individual artist. Some felt that they would fare better if given the opportunity to apply for funding in a different format, such as an interview or short presentation.

b) Accessibility

ITAs who need financial support for accessibility costs associated with their work are at a disadvantage in the current system. While accessibility support grants are available, they are tied to project funding. Participants stated that this is problematic for ITAs who require assistance year round, not just when working on a specific project.

One participant who previously worked abroad as an independent theatre artist received year-round assistance for accessibility costs. This meant that organizations who wanted to work with this artist did not incur extra accessibility costs to do so. It also meant that this artist could easily attend meetings and workshops with an assistant when not working on a specific project.

c) Means Tests & Fairness

There was some discussion about how funds might be distributed in ways that take into account an applicants' financial circumstances. A 'means test' could be applied that drew on income tax information or a report on financial assets. This would allow funders to evaluate the unique circumstances and get a more holistic picture of financial need of applicants. Consideration could also be given to their status as member of an equity-seeking group. If this information was considered, funds could be distributed more equitably to achieve strategic outcomes.

RELIANCE ON FREE LABOUR

“*The more time I spent in my art practise, the more my debt rose; and yet I was being told I was successful.*”

“*In working together with operating companies, there should be a standard across the industry in terms of payment terms and conditions; it's weird to be considered a professional and not encounter professionalism.*”

ITAs described many experiences they had working in this industry for fees well below living wages. This props up the existing theatre-making system as it can be seen as an ongoing, even unquestioned contribution to the status quo. It's a source of resentment and resistance from ITAs and the was much discussed in terms of a

'gratitude deficit' enforced by powerful institutions and gatekeepers in the industry. Participants felt that because of the intense competition for scarce resources, ITAs are told to be 'grateful for breadcrumbs', i.e. to be happy to make a small amount of money when others in similar positions are not making any. Keeping ITAs in this state of gratitude deficit promotes low self-worth which in turn prevents them from asking for the compensation they deserve.

An independent producer and director completed a paid producing program at a mainstream institution. She was told repeatedly throughout the program "you are so lucky to be paid to be here." When she entered the industry to work as a producer, she found that there was an expectation that she would work for free. Independent artists would pitch her on their projects, but not have any money allocated for her compensation. The devaluation of the work of the producer, which is reinforced by the messaging around this paid training program, has permeated the industry to the point that many independent producers are expected work for free.

When theatre operators demand unpaid or underpaid work it also limits who can participate in the sector. The financial sacrifice required means that people without a financial safety net do not have the privilege to give their time, skill, and expertise freely. Participants felt strongly that an inability to work for free should not exclude anyone from working in the arts.

FUNDING MODEL VS FINANCING MODEL

“*Producers in this country learn about funding, not financing. We are conditioned to think below the line, not above the line as an entrepreneur. They don't have the entrepreneur mindset that you are worthy of making money off art.*”

The conventional mind-set regarding arts funding is a combination of ticket sales, granting and donations. Workshop participants stated that

they continue to spend a great deal of time and energy on applying for grants and donations - even though this can be an unstable and unreliable source of support. Some participants suggested that ITAs could enhance revenues by increasing their efforts to make their work 'profitable', to be more 'entrepreneurial'. It was suggested that ITAs need to learn how to go about this, and requested education and training in these areas.

ACCESS TO PRIVATE PHILANTHROPY AND DONORS

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What silos the majors is there's a tremendous amount of money that is from corporate and financial donations from the ruling class. They need to donate. It's disconnected from the audience. It's a particular funding stream. It's the playground of rich people. The way indie connects with these institutions is haphazard. You'll never be able to funnel that into a hip audience. Money needs to go somewhere more central so it can go from the bottom up.

Large theatre institutions enjoy the support of individual and corporate donations. These institutions own large buildings and put on prestigious productions, and private donors are happy to be associated with them. Workshop participants viewed this as inequitable because as ITAs, they do much of the heavy-lifting developing theatre artists though they have little or no access to lucrative philanthropic networks. Private donors may be interested in supporting independent theatre, but there is virtually no dialogue between the two groups. Additionally, the mid-level operating companies who do have access to private money are often very protective of that access and do not encourage networking with other independent theatre makers. Participants stated that there is an overwhelming sense that 'there's only a small piece of the pie available for their industry, and they do not want to give up their piece'. More dialogue between private donors and ITAs could help reimagine a more abundant model of networking and the amount of pie available for sharing.



4. THE ARTISTS AND OPERATORS ECOSYSTEM

ITAs will often collaborate with small, independent-minded operating companies to produce their work, sometimes even pooling funding and resources to get the work made. This mutually beneficial relationship gives companies interesting and innovative work with which to fill their seasons. It also gives ITAs access to administrative resources, mentorship, and rehearsal and performance space. Operating companies and ITAs have a common goal - to bring experimental and innovative theatre to audiences, especially people who do not have access to or interest in mainstream theatre. However some divergent priorities can lead to an inequitable working relationship. In this section, participants discussed how this relationship currently functions and identified opportunities for strengthening and improving the mutual benefits.

SHARING THE RISKS & REWARDS

“*There is pressure to execute perfectly so collaboration is very specific and doesn't allow space to experiment, to try new ideas or partnerships.*”

“*Innovation happens when organisations take risks on different kinds of artists.*”

Operating companies will often work with ITAs whose voices and perspectives they want to champion, yet the companies are, in the end, responsible for selling tickets. Workshop participants said that this can create tension between independent artists who want to take risks and the companies who have a desire to sell seats. ITAs feel immense pressure to put forward their best work, but also feel compelled to play it safe because there's no room to fail.

There is a fear that if the show underperforms at the box office, future working relationships could be jeopardized. For their part, operating companies acknowledge they are beholden to their mandates and their audiences, but do not see their decisions as being completely audience-led. Both ITAs and operators report being keen to share both the risks and rewards of producing provocative, innovative work and move forward together.

GENEROUS TO A FAULT

“*There should be a healthy ecosystem where we experience each other as resources and collaborators. We each bring different values and currencies, whether it's exposure to different audiences on the operators' side, or different perspectives and lived experiences on the artists' side.*”

While many ITAs view operating companies as gatekeepers to the industry who have the resources to produce their work, small operating companies feel there is a misconception about how much they have to give. Small operating companies seek out ITAs in the community, follow their work, and give them the opportunities to work and hone their craft. According to some workshop participants this often involves a fair bit of unacknowledged and/or unpaid effort like networking, coffee meetings, socializing and mentoring. Staff expressed the feeling that their companies were seen as 'stepping stones' by some ITAs and their efforts to support and showcase emerging talent was not always reciprocated once the artist gets called up to the majors and their primarily white audiences. Conversely, some ITAs felt that while the major festivals may not be everyone's end career goal,

it can be perceived to be deeply validating to have success at this level. This might suggest an implicit race bias in how 'success' is defined in the industry.

“*Independent theatre is at risk because artists want to move to larger institutions. They want to be seen by mainstream audiences. And there are issues of internalized racism – until they are seen by white audiences of Soulpepper or Stratford or Shaw, they feel they haven't made it. How can we offer artists comfort in staying independent? To support and give a community to artists of colour and artists with disabilities, for example?*

WORKING TOGETHER

“*Large institutions want to own all the work and take the credit. I can only collaborate with people who leave my name and my company's name on the work.*

“*Institutions operate under a corporate model that is resistant to change, but we work with artists that are changing.*

“*When working inside larger institutions, sometimes it doesn't feel like you're an independent artist anymore.*

“*There isn't a lot of historical precedent to this kind of collaboration. We're adjusting institutionally to how a co-production works.*

Both ITAs and small operating companies agree that the collaboration model between the two is evolving and can be difficult to manage. ITAs need to collaborate with companies, but also want to maintain creative freedom and proprietary rights over their work. The companies acknowledge that artists want a nuanced collaboration model, but face institutional challenges including boards and staff who can be slow to adapt to a more progressive relationship. One independent director and performer said they wanted “a healthy ecosystem where we experience each other as resources and collaborators.” A participant who worked at an operating company said that there is no fixed way to collaborate with independent artists, so they are starting from scratch with every collaboration.



5. RESOURCE SHARING

Over the course of the day's discussions, workshop participants suggested several areas where the sector's limited resources could be shared, notably space, expertise and audience development.

SPACE

“*There isn't a space for experimentation in the physical sense.*”

“*These large buildings, these institutions that are empty most of the time - there needs to be a long time vision to partner with the city and corporations to keep them as performance art spaces, and to recognize that they can be used to subsidize independent artists with rehearsal and living space.*”

The issue of rehearsal space came up many times in conversation. ITAs felt strongly that they do not have adequate access to affordable, accessible, safe rehearsal space. Without the time and space to experiment in rehearsal, the work suffers. One participant suggested that the large lobbies of civic theatres be made available to independent artists as rehearsal space when not in use. This would be a boon to ITAs, but also to these large theatres who are struggling for relevance to the community.

EXPERTISE

“*Having an administrative support makes a powerful difference- what an amazing way to clear your creative mind to do what you should be doing, which is making art.*”

In addition to the creative work of independent theatre, there are many specialized administrative tasks that are necessary to produce and promote the work. For ITAs and for small operating companies, that work can put a stick in the wheel of the creative process. Independent organizations and artists struggle because they have many of the same administrative responsibilities as the large institutions, but there are much fewer people to do the work. Several workshop participants felt that a model in which marketing, accounting, and other non-theatre-making work can be shared between artists and companies would benefit the work by reducing duplication of effort amongst individuals.

AUDIENCES

Audience development is crucial to independent theatre makers. In larger institutions, subscription or membership models help guarantee audience numbers and provide a capital infusion before the season begins. ITAs don't offer a season of work, and it can be difficult to direct audiences' attention to a single show with a limited run. By presenting independent work together as a “season,” ITAs and small operating companies could benefit from the audience outreach of their colleagues. Additionally, there was a suggestion that community newspapers (who also receive Ontario Arts Council grants) help promote independent theatre to their communities by having a calendar of independent theatre in their publications.

6. MAKING A LIVING, LIVING IS MAKING

“*People don't understand that the work of making a city beautiful has inherent worth. I need the society I live in to value the work I do.*

The scarcity of resources in the independent theatre sector is related to the general undervaluing of art and artists in Canadian society. While low wages, unpaid work, and precarious employment are not unique to the independent theatre sector, one participant wondered if the conversation around these issues would change if there was a higher perceived value for the work.

COMPENSATION

“*Is the only way to 'make a living' to work 15 hours a day? What industry are we building? Is that the model of success?*

“*Everyone in our institution takes other jobs because the salaries are so low, but we still need to maintain the quality of our programming.*

“*The level of excellence of the art that I present is not in line with what I'm paid. As an actor, I need vitality, energy, and health. I can't afford to fuel myself with healthy food consistently, to deliver the standard of work that I want to and that is expected of me.*

The Canadian Actors' Equity Association is tasked with the responsibility of representing the labour interests of professional theatre workers. Despite this, workshop participants said that they did not feel supported by the organization. Experienced ITAs and those just beginning their careers stated

that they are often paid the same amount, which they did not consider a living wage. One artistic director of an operating company reported that salaries in their organization have been frozen for ten years. Participants felt that given the rising cost of living in Toronto choosing a career path in theatre was very limiting and even threatening to one's financial security and health.

LABOUR IN GENERAL

“*We used to be the weird contract workers with no benefits...we do this to make a sacrifice to do what we love. Now many more people live like this.*

“*I didn't make this choice [to work in a precarious industry] in contrast to a secure union job. This is as secure as any other industry.*

Several participants noted that the financial struggles of ITAs are not unique to this industry. There have been and will continue to be increasing swaths of the population whose work becomes precarious or obsolete. It was suggested that the theatre community should reach out and align with other workers to forge new ways forward where all people can live and work with dignity.

CASE STUDY: INDEPENDENT PRODUCERS

The role of the independent producer is one that many participants pointed to as a glaring example of the devaluation of labour and expertise in their industry. One freelance producer said that most directors who approach her about producing their show do not have a budget line item in to pay her.

Participants agreed that the work of the independent producer is essential to the success of a show. Many of the difficulties

ITAs encounter while putting together a show can be countered by the work of a professional producer, including financing, marketing, and other administrative tasks that can become the responsibility of the already overloaded director. In spite of the value producers offer, they are often asked to work for free or are omitted from a production all together. In the first scenario, a producer is forced to underwrite the show with their free labour. In the second scenario, other artists involved with the production have to take on that workload, interrupting the creative process and their own well-being.



7. SHIFT PRIORITIES, INCREASE PARTICIPATION

“*Everything and nothing is possible for an independent artist at the same time. We have the artistic freedom to create anything we can imagine, but are limited by our lack of access to resources.*”

Taken together, input from the participants point to several places where an infusion of resources could make a concrete and significant impact on the quality of the lives and work of ITAs. Viewed from this angle, the key to improving the conditions for ITAs is quite easy - more money. A more challenging question is why - why should donors and funders care about independent theatre?

Canada's large theatre institutions receive millions of dollars in private donations every year. Donors know that the arts and theatre are a worthy beneficiary because of the power they have to uplift and transform culture. While large theatre establishments primarily benefit from the philanthropic community's goodwill towards the arts, there is a strong case that independent theatre could make an even greater impact with those donations - theatre is for everyone and the time is right for a shift in priorities.

THEATRE IS FOR EVERYONE

“*Institutions cater to their audiences. If we go through the majors, we are missing lenses that bring new audiences.*”

Large festivals and companies in Canada have the attention of an established, primarily monied set of theatre-goers. This leaves a vast array of underserved arts patrons who likely do not feel that Canadian theatre is for them. ITAs are

currently doing the work of bridging that distance between prospective audiences and the theatre by programming in languages other than English and French and cultivating audiences with innovative and inclusive performances. Directing a donation to this effort is helping to increase the value of the theatre to all citizens.

Toronto is historically one of the premiere theatre cities in North America. This has not happened by accident. In the early 20th century, the Royal Alexandra Theatre was founded by a group of wealthy business people who sought to put Toronto on the map as a place of culture and refinement. Since then, government funding and private donations have helped maintain Toronto's position as a theatre city. Now, it will take a concerted effort from passionate individuals with the power to make change to support the continued evolution of Toronto as one of the most dynamic places where theatre happens.

If we can agree that theatre matters, and we can agree that independent theatre brings the art form to more and diverse audiences, then it is clear that funding independent theatre is necessary for continued thriving of this medium in Toronto and across the country. The current model of self-funding and self-producing has fractured the industry and inhibits artists from making their best work. A robust shift in funding structures and priorities could change the landscape of independent theatre, and transform people into audiences.