

Scaffolding for Change: Artist-Led Insights from the Space Project

An impact report on
what becomes possible
when artists are given
free creative space

Compiled and written by
Robin Sokoloski, Mass Culture
Photography by
Mary Anderson, Why Not Theatre



The

SPACE

Why Not Theatre's Space Project has been generously funded by
Canada Council for the Arts and Metcalf Foundation.



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada

**METCALF
FOUNDATION**

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

“Artists are among the working poor in cities across Canada. Every year more and more artists are being driven out due to the rising cost of living. Yet their contributions to urban space are vital. Artists reignite neighbourhoods, boost economic growth, and make cities a more communal and livable place. As we continue to grow and develop cities like Toronto or Edmonton, we are starving out the very people who make these cities 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 is one way to do that.”

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

1.1 The Space Crisis & Why
This Space Project Matters

1.2 Overview of the Space Project

1.3 This Phase of the Space Project:
Where Reflection Meets Action

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

1.1 The Space Crisis & Why This Space Project Matters

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

1.1 The Space Crisis & Why This Space Project Matters

1.2 Overview of the Space Project

1.3 This Phase of the Space Project: Where Reflection Meets Action

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

Across Canada, artists are experiencing an escalating crisis: the loss of accessible, stable, and affordable spaces to create, rehearse, perform, and gather. The arts sector, already operating on the economic margins, is being squeezed by rapidly rising real estate prices, redevelopment of older industrial buildings, and a lack of long-term security in leasing. This displacement is not merely a logistical challenge; it strikes at the very heart of artistic practice, community-building, and cultural continuity.

According to a Globe and Mail feature on the real estate crisis in the arts, organizations and artists are being pushed out of city spaces they once animated. Rental costs for arts organizations have risen nearly 38% from 2019 to 2023, far outpacing inflation, despite a slight nominal decrease in real estate fees during the same period.¹ Meanwhile, artists remain among the most economically precarious workers in Canada, often unable to absorb these added costs.

A shift from traditional venues has given rise to a wave of improvised and adaptive solutions: artist-run venues sharing space, repurposing unconventional sites like shopping malls, securing short-term “meanwhile” leases in vacant properties, launching community bond campaigns to purchase buildings, and establishing land trusts to protect long-term access to space. While each of these models functions differently and presents its own unique challenges and advantages, collectively they represent powerful acts of resilience and creative responses to an increasingly hostile real estate landscape.

¹ Josh O’Kane, “The arts are facing a real-estate crisis. Here are four ways artists are trying to fix it,” The Globe and Mail, January 2025. Available at: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/article-arts-real-estate-crisis-canada/>

Throughout this stage of Why Not Theatre’s Space Project, the depth of the crisis has come into sharp focus. Across more than a hundred survey responses collected by Mass Culture, artists consistently highlighted how the lack of access to space limits their ability to sustain careers, build community, or explore ambitious ideas. Many expressed frustration at being priced out of their own cities, unable to find rehearsal or studio space, and struggling with short-term leases that offered no stability or control over their working environment.

“Nothing can happen without space. It is not just a venue; it is a material of dance.”

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

Why does this matter? Because space is not just a backdrop for the arts, it is foundational. Space is where cultural knowledge is produced, where artists engage communities, and where collaboration and risk-taking flourish. When space becomes scarce, so too does the possibility for cultural transformation and equity. Addressing this crisis is not simply about saving square footage; it is about preserving the conditions necessary for the arts to thrive. Moreover, through this study, it has become clear that providing space is just the tip of the iceberg. Access to space often acts as a catalyst, uncovering broader systemic challenges, revealing the broader ecosystem of supports required for a truly healthy and sustainable arts infrastructure. From financial security and accessible transportation to childcare, technical resources, and time, the act of offering space exposes the full spectrum of what it actually takes to support artists meaningfully. Artists across the study repeatedly underscored that “consistent access to funding →

1.1 The Space Crisis & Why This Space Project Matters

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

1.1 The Space Crisis & Why This Space Project Matters

1.2 Overview of the Space Project

1.3 This Phase of the Space Project: Where Reflection Meets Action

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

and mentorship” is essential, as is the availability of “space that is accessible,” physically, financially, culturally, and otherwise. Several respondents mentioned the lack of support for “childcare during residency programs” or the strain of balancing caregiving with artistic work. Others pointed to the need for “technical resources like sound equipment, lighting, and digital tools” that are often inaccessible or cost-prohibitive. Many also highlighted how the pressures of “having to work multiple jobs to survive” leave them with insufficient time or energy to focus on their practice. These reflections reveal that space alone is not enough; it must be accompanied by a holistic infrastructure that considers the full scope of an artist’s lived experience.

We hope people who read this will come to understand the interconnected nature of support required to best facilitate artists to make their work, however, our report focused solely on one variable: *Space*. Free space for artists – how this simple and radical idea can change an artist’s life. It is possible to do this within existing infrastructures, and the broader impact (if scaled) would make the lives of people in cities better. Period.

Throughout this report, the voices of the artists who shared their reflections with us over the past year serve as our primary guides, bridging the gap between what we know and what we need to do. This is the scaffolding, a framework for imagining differently.

1.2 Overview of the Space Project

“Space is not just a venue; it’s a tool for liberation and growth.”

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

1.1 The Space Crisis & Why This Space Project Matters

1.2 Overview of the Space Project

1.3 This Phase of the Space Project: Where Reflection Meets Action

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

In 2023, Why Not Theatre had applied to run an expanded pilot of its previous Space Project, whereby the company would enter into partnerships with real estate developers to broker a series of ‘meanwhile’ and ‘temporary’ rehearsal spaces in Toronto that would be offered to artists on a subsidized basis. The intention was to test out a business model that Why Not Theatre believed would be sustainable and replicable in other cities and by other companies.

However, on further investigation, it became clear that this centralized model was unsustainable. Managing numerous spaces placed too heavy of an administrative burden on Why Not Theatre or any other single theatre company that might act as broker. Moreover, the model relied on artists paying for space, albeit at a partially-subsidized rate. This was not viable, especially for equity-seeking artists and companies that have difficulty affording short-term rentals, let alone leases or mortgages. Artscape’s bankruptcy further confirmed the urgency of providing free space to artists and to stop asking the poorest people to solve the problem of gentrification and space unaffordability in Canadian cities.

In response to these learnings, Why Not shifted its model to a decentralized one, whereby a consortium of arts organizations in cities across Canada would provide free space to artists within their local communities. We recognized that people across the country are experiencing the same challenges with space, and everyone is doing their best (often sacrificing out of pocket) to try and solve

this problem. The one consistent barrier each of those “problem solvers” faced was access to funds. In our pilot, we wanted to find a way to financially support the people who are already making the sacrifices to do the work. Each partner would receive a portion of the grant and help document the research activities.

In this revised iteration, Why Not chose to investigate both ‘meanwhile’ and ‘temporary’ spaces. ‘Meanwhile’ spaces are spaces owned by private developers that sit vacant while the developer seeks a renter or is in the process of a major renovation. A meanwhile lease provides a mechanism for artists to use these spaces in the ‘in-between’ time. ‘Temporary’ spaces are spaces that artists or arts organizations rent out in order to service the community. Typically, the artist or arts organization that assumes the burden of the lease recoups their costs through daily/weekly rental fees paid by artists. It is possible for a meanwhile space to become a temporary space, with time and a good relationship with the developer.

Meanwhile and temporary spaces exist in a number of Canadian cities. However, with the cost of space in urban centres continuing to rise at an alarming rate, the burden of this price inflation is increasingly passed on to the artists renting these sites.

In the 2024-2025 iteration of Space Project, participating artists were offered space free-of-charge and the project partners, with direction from Why Not Theatre and Mass Culture, captured the effects of fully-subsidized space on artists and their communities.

1.3 This Phase of the Space Project

Where Reflection Meets Action

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

1.1 The Space Crisis & Why This Space Project Matters

1.2 Overview of the Space Project

1.3 This Phase of the Space Project: Where Reflection Meets Action

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

Since 2018, Why Not Theatre has been intentionally exploring issues of access to space, initially with a focus on theatre creators. By July 2024, the scope of this inquiry had expanded significantly, prompting Ravi Jain to reach out to Robin Sokoloski at Mass Culture to study the evolution of the Space Project, which now included various partner venues across Toronto, Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo, Regina, and Edmonton.

A series of reports, executive summaries, business model projections, and case studies commissioned by Why Not Theatre laid the groundwork for this current phase of the project, providing a solid foundation from which to dive deeper and centre the lived experiences of artists. While this study always held an eye toward how the findings could inform and influence policy, it was never framed in a directive way. Instead, the approach was intentionally reflective, prioritizing the integrity of the artists' voices and allowing insights to emerge from the ground up.

As is customary, Mass Culture approached the complexity of this work through a learning framework, an organized set of learning pillars and questions designed to guide inquiry across three core impact areas: understanding the needs and experiences of artists; examining Why Not Theatre's evolving role and positionality in the project; and evaluating the efficacy of the dispersed partnership model. These learning pillars grounded the study and charted the path for our collective understanding.

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

2.1 About Why Not Theatre:
From Theatre Company to
Creative Infrastructure Hub

2.2 About Mass Culture: A
National Platform for
Sector-Wide Learning

2.3 Working Together:
Mass Culture's Role
in the Space Project

2.4 Project Objectives,
Methodology, and
Shared Values

2.5 The Importance of
Working In Process

2.6 Multi-Modal Resources

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

PARTNERS in RESEARCH

2.1 About Why Not Theatre

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

2.1 About Why Not Theatre:
From Theatre Company to
Creative Infrastructure Hub

2.2 About Mass Culture: A
National Platform for
Sector-Wide Learning

2.3 Working Together:
Mass Culture's Role
in the Space Project

2.4 Project Objectives,
Methodology, and
Shared Values

2.5 The Importance of
Working In Process

2.6 Multi-Modal Resources

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

From Theatre Company to Creative Infrastructure Hub



Launched in 2007, Why Not Theatre is a Toronto-based international touring company whose work exists at the intersection of art, innovation, and social change. As a non-profit organization, Why Not is dedicated to ‘rethinking how stories are told, who gets to tell them and most importantly who those stories are for’. Since its inception, the company has produced over 56 plays, which have garnered 40+ awards/nominations and received critical and public acclaim. These productions have toured to over 82 stops in 11 countries.

In 2018, Why Not was experiencing unprecedented growth. As a result, we were 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?

Like all of our artistic processes we began with questions: What if we could make space free for artists? What new storytellers could that enable? What new stories and ways of telling them could emerge?

This report (along with many others) is the culmination of seven years of diving into those questions.

2.2 About Mass Culture

A National Platform for Sector-Wide Learning

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

2.1 About Why Not Theatre:
From Theatre Company to
Creative Infrastructure Hub

2.2 About Mass Culture: A
National Platform for
Sector-Wide Learning

2.3 Working Together:
Mass Culture's Role
in the Space Project

2.4 Project Objectives,
Methodology, and
Shared Values

2.5 The Importance of
Working In Process

2.6 Multi-Modal Resources

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix



Mass Culture is a national support arts organization committed to working alongside the arts community.

Rooted in principles of community-based research, Mass Culture collaborates with artists, organizations, academics, funders, and cultural workers to surface questions that matter and explore them collectively.

Its approach is grounded in active listening, co-creation, and shared ownership of knowledge. Central to its mission is the belief that research should be accessible, actionable, and in service of the sector. By supporting the free flow of knowledge, through open reports, creatively facilitated convenings, and collaborative learning tools, Mass Culture helps strengthen the cultural ecosystem from within, empowering the sector to reflect, adapt, and grow together.

2.3 Working Together

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

2.1 About Why Not Theatre:
From Theatre Company to
Creative Infrastructure Hub

2.2 About Mass Culture: A
National Platform for
Sector-Wide Learning

2.3 Working Together:
Mass Culture's Role
in the Space Project

2.4 Project Objectives,
Methodology, and
Shared Values

2.5 The Importance of
Working In Process

2.6 Multi-Modal Resources

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

Mass Culture's Role in the Space Project

The Space Project was shaped by a deeply collaborative process between Mass Culture and Why Not Theatre. Over a year, Robin Sokoloski (Mass Culture) and Mary Anderson (Why Not Theatre) worked in close partnership, co-creating every aspect of the project's design, implementation, and reflection. Nothing was done in isolation; every step was grounded in shared dialogue and joint decision-making.

Together, Robin and Mary developed a learning framework that guided the inquiry from beginning to end, rooted in curiosity, responsiveness, and a commitment to meeting people where they are through care. Robin proposed creative approaches to insight gathering, while Mary spent time in the spaces, meeting with artists and tailoring strategies to each unique context. They co-hosted two sensemaking sessions with venue partners to collectively deepen the interpretation of emerging insights.

2.4 Project Objectives, Methodology, and Shared Values

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

2.1 About Why Not Theatre:
From Theatre Company to
Creative Infrastructure Hub

2.2 About Mass Culture: A
National Platform for
Sector-Wide Learning

2.3 Working Together:
Mass Culture's Role
in the Space Project

2.4 Project Objectives,
Methodology, and
Shared Values

2.5 The Importance of
Working In Process

2.6 Multi-Modal Resources

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

Objective 1

Center the lived experiences of artists

Goal

Understand how space influences artists' creative, economic, and personal well-being.

How We Did This

We began by developing a series of brief, intentionally designed surveys under the banner "Follow the Artists Through Space." Guided by our co-created learning framework, we designed a phased approach to insight gathering: an initial intake form, a general survey sent to artists after their use of the space, a follow-up survey that shared preliminary findings from earlier responses, and finally, a customized question tailored to each of the 100+ participating artists based on their previous answers.

This layered approach served as our core methodology. However, we quickly recognized the need to adapt our process to better meet artists where they were. In response, we added more relational and interactive methods, including question booths, writing stations, and a speakers corner where Mary could engage more directly with artists and their communities.

These adjustments ensured the process remained accessible, flexible, and grounded in trust.

Objective 2

Examine Why Not Theatre's evolving role

Goal

Explore how Why Not Theatre facilitated the Space Project while navigating its own evolving institutional identity.

How We Did This

As the project unfolded, Robin and Mary used their regular check-ins as opportunities to record a series of video diaries. Guided by the learning framework and attuned to the specific phase of the project's evolution, Robin would interview Mary to reflect on real-time developments, challenges, and observations. These sessions became valuable moments of documentation and analysis, with key insights captured and added to the digital whiteboard alongside those gathered from artists and partners.

This practice not only ensured continuity in learning, but also embodied the project's core values of reflection, reciprocity, and shared sense-making.

2.4 Project Objectives, Methodology, and Shared Values

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

2.1 About Why Not Theatre:
From Theatre Company to
Creative Infrastructure Hub

2.2 About Mass Culture: A
National Platform for
Sector-Wide Learning

2.3 Working Together:
Mass Culture's Role
in the Space Project

2.4 Project Objectives,
Methodology, and
Shared Values

2.5 The Importance of
Working In Process

2.6 Multi-Modal Resources

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

Objective 3

Evaluate the effectiveness of a dispersed partnership model

Goal

Understand how multiple venues supported locally grounded approaches to space-making.

How We Did This

To evaluate the effectiveness of the dispersed partnership model, we focused on understanding how several unique venues across Toronto, Hamilton, Kitchener/Waterloo, Regina, and Edmonton each approached the work of offering free space to artists. Rather than applying a uniform set of expectations, we honoured the distinct contexts, capacities, and community dynamics of each partner.

We gathered insights through multiple touchpoints: informal check-ins with venue leads, feedback captured through artist surveys, and field notes from site visits and partner observations. A key qualitative method used was a Photovoice approach, authored by Mary, in which she visited each venue and documented its physical and atmospheric qualities through photography and written reflection. This work culminated in a blog article shared by Mass Culture with the broader sector, capturing the essence of each space and offering a textured, story-driven account of how space functions in practice.

We also co-hosted two sensemaking sessions, one in-person and one online, where all venue partners came together to reflect, share lessons, identify tensions, and explore patterns across their diverse experiences.

These conversations and artifacts illuminated both the strengths and challenges of working across geographies and organizational cultures. They reinforced the value of flexibility, relational trust, and place-based responsiveness over rigid models of delivery. In staying attuned to each partner's way of working, we upheld a core value of this project: that collaboration thrives when rooted in mutual respect, context-specific wisdom, and a willingness to learn from difference.

2.4 Project Objectives, Methodology, and Shared Values

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

2.1 About Why Not Theatre:
From Theatre Company to
Creative Infrastructure Hub

2.2 About Mass Culture: A
National Platform for
Sector-Wide Learning

2.3 Working Together:
Mass Culture's Role
in the Space Project

2.4 Project Objectives,
Methodology, and
Shared Values

2.5 The Importance of
Working In Process

2.6 Multi-Modal Resources

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

Objective 4

Surface insights that could inform policy without being prescriptive

Goal

Allow insights to emerge organically from artist experiences while maintaining the integrity of their voices.

How We Did This

The original learning framework included a fourth pillar titled “Policy & Advocacy Implications.” However, as the project progressed, the richness and depth of the artists’ responses demanded our full attention. Rather than approaching policy as a separate track, we chose to focus our time and energy on amplifying these voices through the methods described above, including two sensemaking sessions with the seven venue partners.

This shift allowed us to go deeper, trusting that the power of the evidence lives within the voices themselves. We believed that by compiling and presenting these insights in a multi-modal way at various stages of the project, we could create the knowledge products necessary to support Why Not Theatre, its partners, and the wider arts sector in making the case for sustainable, artist-centered space.

This decision reflects a shared value that has grounded the project from the beginning: that meaningful systems change starts with listening deeply and honouring lived experience.

2.5 The Importance of Working In Process

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

2.1 About Why Not Theatre: From Theatre Company to Creative Infrastructure Hub

2.2 About Mass Culture: A National Platform for Sector-Wide Learning

2.3 Working Together: Mass Culture's Role in the Space Project

2.4 Project Objectives, Methodology, and Shared Values

2.5 The Importance of Working In Process

2.6 Multi-Modal Resources

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

It was decided early on that process-based learning would be prioritized and valued in the Space Project. This approach allowed us to remain present with the work and be open to any obstacle or challenge that might arise. And the three factors that helped support this framework were money, time, and collaboration.

The Space Project was funded in such a generous way that it allowed for a level of freedom to experiment and play. We could test new ideas, reimagine old ones, assess and reassess outcomes, and reflect on our discoveries – all within a supportive and flexible timeframe. As a result, we had the opportunity to think more critically, be receptive to problem-solving, and stay reflexive throughout the research process.

For example, Why Not Theatre had initially wanted to partner with a web-based platform that connects artists with venues to schedule live programming. The goal was to have each project partner implement the tool into their venue-booking system so that securing space could be easily managed – both for the artist and the venue operator. However, as each partner assessed the application, different needs could not be met. Some venues required specificity around the availability of their spaces, whereas others already had a booking system in place. Also, the partners felt overwhelmed by the administrative burden of the platform, which ironically was designed to streamline the process. Therefore, it was decided that we would no longer incorporate it, and that going forward, our partners' needs would take precedence.

Another component that we had to be responsive to were schedules. In some cases, partners had to shift dates in their programming calendars to coincide with organizational funding, which altered the dates of deliverables on our end. Similar negotiations were reflected in experiences with property leases. Artists and arts organizations, including Why Not Theatre, had to juggle bureaucratic demands with accessing meanwhile spaces, such as legalities and insurance requirements. These unforeseen circumstances required more time and cooperation, as well as financial support to sustain our project goals.

If these situations did not have the funding or resiliency amongst project partners, the outcomes may have played out quite differently. Our hope in highlighting these examples is to illustrate the significance of in-process learning, specifically in arts and culture research, and the affects of adequate funding, flexible timelines, and strategic partnerships.

2.6 Multi-Modal Resources

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

2.1 About Why Not Theatre: From Theatre Company to Creative Infrastructure Hub

2.2 About Mass Culture: A National Platform for Sector-Wide Learning

2.3 Working Together: Mass Culture's Role in the Space Project

2.4 Project Objectives, Methodology, and Shared Values

2.5 The Importance of Working In Process

2.6 Multi-Modal Resources

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

Learning Framework

A foundational document that outlines the learning pillars and key questions that shaped the inquiry and structured the entire project.

[→ View the Framework](#)

Research Journey Video

A behind-the-scenes look at the collaborative relationship between Mass Culture and Why Not Theatre, capturing how we co-created, adapted, and learned together throughout the project.

[→ Watch the Video](#)

Virtual Insight Board

A publicly accessible digital whiteboard featuring compiled reflections from artists, Why Not Theatre, and project partners, organized thematically to surface patterns and shared learning.

[→ Explore the Insight Board](#)

Photovoice: Documenting Space

A visual storytelling project created by Mary Anderson, using photography and written reflection to capture the character and impact of each venue involved in the Space Project.

[→ View the Photovoice Feature](#)

Podcast: Belonging in Space

A three-part podcast on the theme of belonging in creative spaces – in the past, the present, and future – told through the voices of nine artists across Tangled Art + Disability's history.

[→ Check out the podcast](#)

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

SPACE PARTNER PROFILES

This phase of the Space Project partnered with various independent artists and arts organizations, each offering a unique model for providing space to artists.

To make the distinction, an independent artist is an artist with no outside infrastructure. They do not gain a full time salary for making art, but rather work contract to contract, often relying on government grants or partnerships with institutions to make their work. Independent artists do not have the ability to solicit donations or private fundraising, and often lack the networks to access those communities of support.

Arts organizations, in this case, have more infrastructure. They often have few salaried employees (often underpaid), and the bulk of their funding comes from government grants, which renew annually and provide operational funds. Often arts organizations have charitable numbers and can solicit private and foundational support, however their capacity is limited due to understaffing, expertise, and access to a philanthropic network.

The following section introduces the partners (which include both independent artists and arts organizations), explores their motivations for participating, and offers a snapshot of how their spaces supported creative work.

3.1 Aluna Theatre

Space Story Snapshot

www.alunatheatre.ca

Space name
Aluna Studio

Timeframe
November 2024–June 2025

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix



3.1 Aluna Theatre

Space Story Snapshot

www.alunatheatre.ca

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix



Space name

Aluna Studio

Space model

temporary space

Type of space

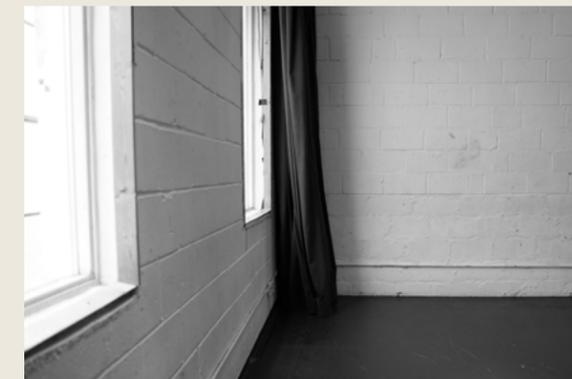
artist studio, industrial, theatre

Timeframe

November 2024–June 2025

Amenities

- Accessible building
- Bike rack
- Chairs & tables
- Drinking water
- Fire extinguisher
- First aid kit
- Gender neutral washroom
- High ceilings
- Kitchen
- Lighting grid
- Noise friendly (evenings/week-ends only)
- Parking
- Projector surface
- Smudge friendly
- Sound system
- Sprung floor
- Temperature control
- Wifi
- Windows/natural light



3.1 Aluna Theatre

www.alunatheatre.ca

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

About

Founded in 2001 in response to the erasure of cultural diversity and women’s voices on Canadian stages, Aluna Theatre is a space for artistic resistance, experimentation, and excellence. Rooted in love, political consciousness, and interdependence, Aluna is committed to amplifying the voices, stories, and performance traditions of the Americas, especially those underrepresented in Canadian theatre.

Through interdisciplinary works, international collaborations, and community-rooted projects, Aluna creates room for artists to work in their full identities, beyond cultural labels, language barriers, or colonial frameworks. The company fosters a vibrant, multilingual, and intersectional Trans-American artistic community that bridges generations, cultures, and

geographies. Aluna envisions a future where racialized, migrant, and newcomer artists not only take centre stage, but help lead and shape the evolution of contemporary performance in Canada and beyond.

Their space story

There is something deeply resonant about a space that has been built and held by artists themselves. Aluna Theatre emerged in response to the systemic barriers that excluded artists — particularly those with accents, from racialized communities, and outside the mainstream. Its founding story, rooted in self-determination and collective care, continues to shape the energy of the space today. Artists aren’t simply accessing a studio — they’re stepping into an ecosystem intentionally designed to support and uplift creative voices.

Space Story Snapshot

Partnership contribution

\$24,000

During the study’s sensemaking session, Aluna co-founder Trevor Schwellnus described an unspoken ethos that guides the space: “Your success is our success.” This sentiment echoes powerfully throughout the artist reflections shared below, many of whom spoke about feeling “held,” encouraged, and genuinely supported in their creative process.

Relationship to Why Not Theatre

Why Not has had a long history of collaboration with Aluna Theatre, primarily in our shared resources platform called RISER. What was unique about Aluna’s participation in our Space Project is that they are a company who, for a long time, has been deeply invested in providing subsidized space and amenities to serve the community. In doing so, they naturally put strain on their organization, which is

already understaffed and under-resourced. What our results show is that by providing more financial resources to companies like Aluna, they in turn can provide free space to artists, which is a win-win for the entire sector. In essence, we are addressing organizational and independent precarity in the sector as a whole.

What we learned by working with them and the artists they engaged

Interviewing artists who participated in the Space Project through Aluna Theatre revealed a layered understanding of how access to free, well-equipped, and emotionally supportive rehearsal space affects the quality, sustainability, and viability of artistic work. But it also revealed something more: The power of entering a space that was built by artists, for artists. At Aluna, the physical room is steeped in story, activism, and solidarity. That →

3.1 Aluna Theatre

Space Story Snapshot

www.alunatheatre.ca

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

legacy continues to shape how artists experience the space: not just as a practical resource, but as a site of creative risk, fair pay, mutual care, and artistic belonging.

Key Learning #1

Space Frees the Artist to Take Creative Risks

When artists are unburdened by financial strain and logistical constraints, they are able to experiment more freely, explore new forms, and make bold creative choices without fear of wasting limited resources.

“Without worrying about money or deadlines, I could just play. I took risks I wouldn’t have taken otherwise, and the piece grew in ways I didn’t expect.”

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

Key Learning #2

Working in an Artist-Centered Space Nurtures Belonging and Creative Confidence

Rehearsing in a space with a history of artistic creation instills a sense of belonging and creative legitimacy. It affirms that the artist is part of a broader ecosystem, which boosts confidence and deepens connection to their work.

“It felt like we were joining a lineage. You can feel the stories in the walls — it made us take the work, and ourselves, more seriously.”

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

Key Learning #3

Free Space Means Fair Pay

When rehearsal space is provided at no cost, artists are able to reallocate limited resources toward paying their collaborators equitably. This not only strengthens working relationships, but also affirms that artistic labour deserves to be compensated fairly — not just when budgets allow, but as a baseline practice.

“Usually, my collaborator gives me a discount because she knows how hard it is to fund a project. This time, I paid her full rate — what she actually asked for. That felt like such a win.”

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

Key Learning #4

Space Shapes the Art Itself

When artists have access to well-equipped, professional spaces, they can experiment more fully with lighting, sound, projection, and movement — all of which directly elevate the quality of the final work. For many, it was the difference between making the work or not making it at all.

“The piece wouldn’t have existed without the space. I wouldn’t have had time to discover what was working or even finish the show.”

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

Space Story Snapshot

artsbuildontario.ca

Space name

99 King St West

Timeframe

May 2025–November 2025

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix



3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

Space Story Snapshot

artsbuildontario.ca

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix



Space name

99 King St West

Timeframe

May 2025–November 2025

Space model

meanwhile space

Amenities

- 24/7 access
- Accessible by transit
- Carpeted floor
- Close to amenities
- Concrete floor
- Fire extinguisher
- First aid kit
- Gender neutral washroom
- Onsite storage
- Shared space
- Smudge friendly
- Street entrance
- Temperature control
- Wifi
- Windows/natural light

Type of space

artist studio



3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

Space Story Snapshot

artsbuildontario.ca

Space name

Wing 404

Timeframe

June 2025–November 2025

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix



3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

Space Story Snapshot

artsbuildontario.ca

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix



Space name

Wing 404

Space model

meanwhile space

Type of space

community hall, theatre

Timeframe

June 2025–November 2025

Amenities

- 24/7 access
- Accessible building
- Accessible by transit
- Accessible washroom
- Bike rack
- Chairs & tables
- Drinking water
- Fire extinguisher
- First aid kit
- Kitchen
- Meeting rooms
- Noise friendly
- Onsite storage
- Parking
- Projector surface
- Shared space
- Smudge friendly
- Sound system
- Street entrance
- Washroom
- Wifi
- Windows/natural light



3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

Space Story Snapshot

artsbuildontario.ca

Partnership contribution

\$20,000

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

About

ArtsBuild Ontario (ABO) is the only organization in Ontario and Canada dedicated to supporting the infrastructure needs of arts, cultural, and creative organizations. For over two decades, ABO has empowered small and mid-sized organizations with the tools, training, and guidance needed to manage and sustain both physical and digital creative spaces.

Through research, partnerships, and capacity-building programs, ABO works across urban, rural, Indigenous, Northern, and historically underrepresented communities to ensure that creative spaces are equitable, sustainable, and resilient. ABO envisions a future where creative infrastructure is accessible to all, and where organizations of every discipline and geography have what they need to thrive.

Their space story

ABO exists to understand, experiment, teach, and share practices on space for the cultural sector. At the heart of their participation in the Space Project was a commitment not only to offer space, but to actively reimagine how creative spaces are structured, shared, and governed, particularly for artists who have been excluded from traditional studio access.

For this initiative, ABO opened up a location in downtown Kitchener, prioritizing artists who had limited access to existing studio networks, were newer to the region, or shared that they did not feel psychologically safe in other creative spaces. Especially due to factors like gender identity, systemic exclusion, or income barriers. As Eva Hellreich, Program Coordinator at ArtsBuild, shared during the project's sensemaking session:

“We really wanted to intentionally create a space where people could challenge values like scarcity, competition, and exclusivity and instead design what a safe space looks like for them.”

From day one, ABO approached the space not just as a room to work in, but as a container for shared values. During their artist orientation, the cohort co-created a community agreement, rooted in consent, mutual respect, and skill/resource sharing. This foundation quickly blossomed into an organic, artist-led network. Artists began furnishing the space together, exchanging skills (“I’ll help with your marketing if you teach me screen printing”), and coordinating events like life drawing sessions, open studios, and group exhibition visits. Calls for artists circulated on studio walls, and artists wrote each other into the city’s cultural fabric.

This intentional community-building stood in stark contrast to the scarcity mindset that Eva described as common in the Kitchener arts landscape, where existing spaces are often unaffordable, opaque in their access processes, and not designed with inclusivity at the forefront. Within this context, ABO’s intervention was radical in its simplicity: to create a studio space that was transparent, welcoming, and free, both financially and creatively.

In parallel, ArtsBuild is also working with a second space in Waterloo – an old Legion building offered in partnership with the City of Waterloo. While bureaucratic hurdles delayed site access, a group of 10 performing arts collectives were selected to use the space for performing arts production and rehearsals. ABO has also offered the space to artists who expressed interest in the application process, a testament →

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

Space Story Snapshot

artsbuildontario.ca

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

to ArtsBuild’s belief that infrastructure, when equitably shared, can multiply impact.

ArtsBuild Ontario’s role in this project models what happens when landlord alignment, policy experimentation, and artist-centred values intersect.

“It’s been wonderful to see the community forming already,” Eva shared. *“The artists are sharing beautifully — skill sets, networks, support. That’s what this space is for.”*

Relationship to Why Not Theatre

This was a new relationship built through shared values on providing space to artists. We met through our advocacy at Canadian Heritage Cultural Spaces Fund; for a long time we worked with internal officers to advocate for experimental funds to be dispersed to explore these methodologies and ABO was one of those experiments.

What we learned by working with them and the artists they engaged

What emerged from the reflections of artists working in ArtsBuild Ontario-supported spaces wasn’t just appreciation for having a place to work, it was a deeper shift in how they saw themselves and their creative lives. The offer of dedicated studio space unlocked more than productivity; it sparked confidence, connection, and a renewed sense of possibility. Two key learnings surfaced that speak to the powerful ripple effects of space that is freely given and intentionally shared.

Key Learning #1

Space Helps Artists Overcome Imposter Syndrome

For many artists, especially those working from home or navigating caregiving responsibilities, feelings of isolation and self-doubt can erode creative confidence. Gaining access to a dedicated studio space offered more than just room to work; it provided validation. Artists spoke of shedding imposter syndrome, seeing themselves as professionals, and finally being recognized as part of a vibrant creative community.

“It has shifted everything for me. I don’t just feel like a mom painting in the basement anymore, I feel like a real artist in the city. People notice when I’m not there. That changes everything.”

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

Key Learning #2

Shared Space Sparks Connection, Collaboration, and Community

Beyond the financial benefits, artists repeatedly spoke to the emotional and professional value of being around other creatives. The shared space fostered spontaneous feedback, skill-sharing, and a sense of mutual encouragement that’s hard to replicate in isolation.

“Being surrounded by other artists reminds me why I do this. We push each other, support each other, and I’m finally starting to feel part of a real artistic community.”

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

www.capsules.studio

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

Their space story

Capsules Artist Resources Inc., led by multidisciplinary artist Rajni Perera, is a nonprofit initiative aimed to solve the problem of space access for artists in the GTA. Capsules works with values-aligned partners to bring affordable, co-operative workspaces back into Toronto and offers workshops, programming, and access to fabrication space, tools, and skillbuilding.

Why Not's financial contribution helped Capsules cover important early-stage research and development costs. For example, legal fees, transportation for site visits, paid wages for directors and administrative work, document making, email correspondence, and applications for educational programs and grants. The partnership also allowed for both time and flexibility to develop key collaborations and network, and eased the pressure

on the directors balancing full-time practices.

Capsules will be opening a new space in October, 2025, at 1213 Bathurst Street, alongside community partner, Space Unltd. Going forward, they aim to work with 2-3 other organizations to secure a shared Scarborough space – potential partners include Scarborough Arts and SOCA Architecture – and will work closely with the City of Toronto to expedite community tenancy for Capsules, while developing a community network of common spaces.

Space Story Snapshot

Partnership contribution

\$12,000

Timeframe

June 2024–April 2025

Relationship to Why Not Theatre

Rajni is an internationally recognized artist whose work has garnered acclaim across borders. We were fortunate to be introduced to her through a mutual colleague. Our shared commitment to redefining Canadian arts on the international stage and amplifying the voices of new Canadians made this partnership a natural fit.

What we learned by working with them and the artists they engaged

For many artists, the constant hustle to cover rent and overhead costs drains both financial and emotional resources. The opportunity to work in free or subsidized space shifted that balance entirely. Instead of taking on extra jobs to “paint to pay the rent,” artists could redirect their focus toward long-term goals and the kinds of visionary projects that usually get deferred in survival mode.

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

Space Story Snapshot

www.capsules.studio

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

Key Learning

Access to Space Unlocks Time and Energy For Imagining Artistic Futures

This financial relief created room for expansive thinking: opening new studios, forging partnerships with arts organizations, and strengthening the broader ecosystem around them. Artists described space not only as a physical container, but as a catalyst for connection, collaboration, and creative confidence. With the freedom to build large-scale work, revise alongside peers, and feel supported by aligned partners, ambitions that once felt out of reach, such as initiatives like Capsules Artist Resources Inc. in Scarborough, suddenly became imaginable and achievable

“Reduced financial pressure, increased capacity to focus on the tasks related to moving towards opening spaces... I did not have to keep spending my own money on legal fees and admin wages.”

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

“The space gave me the opportunity to connect with artists who are already doing work I would like to get involved in. It gave me room to create a large sculpture... and it really helped me understand it more.”

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

Space Story Snapshot

commongroundarts.ca

Space name

Fringe Theatre Arts Barns

Timeframe

October 2024–May 2025

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix



3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

commongroundarts.ca

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix



Space Story Snapshot

Space name

Fringe Theatre Arts Barns
(Studio A/B, The Backstage Theatre)

Space model

temporary space

Type of space

artist studio, theatre, warehouse

Timeframe

October 2024–May 2025

Amenities

- Accessible building
- Accessible by transit
- Accessible washroom
- Chairs & tables
- Close to amenities
- Concrete floor
- Drinking water
- Fire extinguisher
- First aid kit
- Gender neutral washroom
- High ceilings
- Lighting grid
- Mirrors
- Noise friendly
- Parking
- Private space
- Projector surface
- Security
- Shower
- Smudge friendly
- Sound system
- Sprung floor
- Street entrance
- Temperature control
- Wifi



3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

Space Story Snapshot

commongroundarts.ca

Space name

The Playhouse YEG

Timeframe

October 2024–May 2025

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix



3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

commongroundarts.ca

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

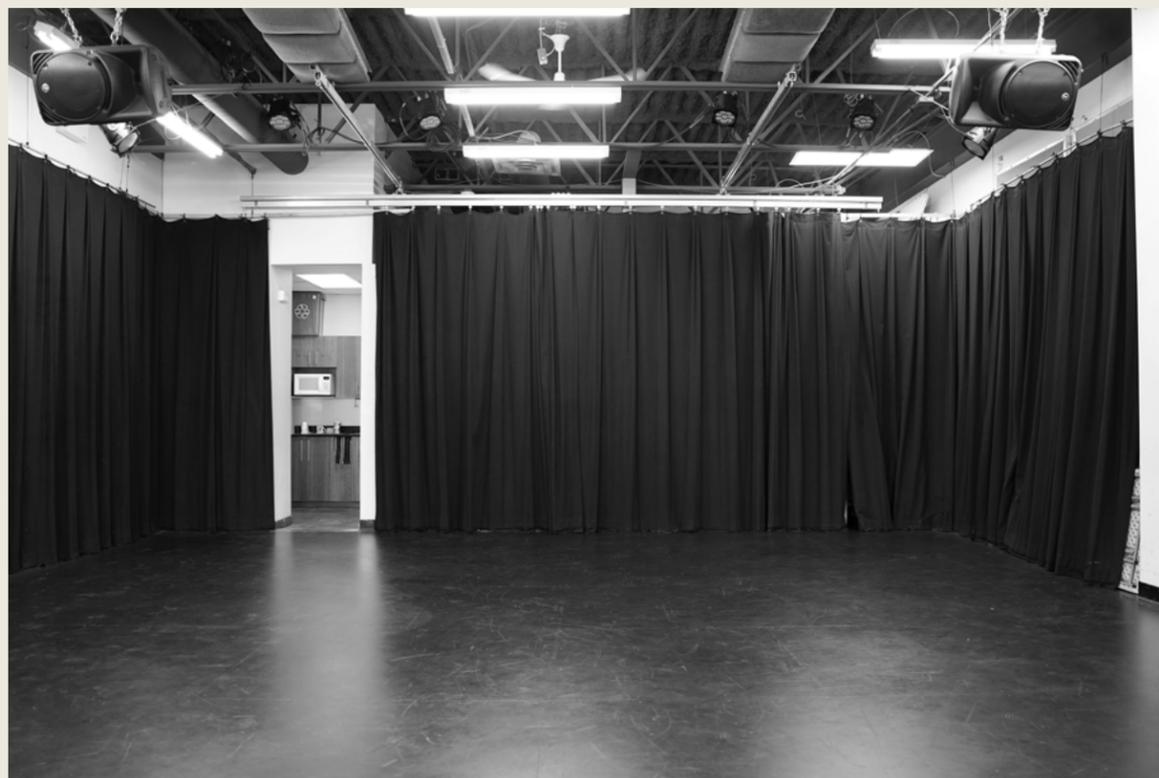
3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix



Space Story Snapshot

Space name

The Playhouse YEG

Timeframe

October 2024–May 2025

Space model

temporary space

Amenities

- 24/7 access
- Accessible building
- Accessible by transit
- Accessible washroom
- Bike rack
- Chairs & tables
- Close to amenities
- Drinking water
- Fire extinguisher
- First aid kit
- Gender neutral washroom
- High ceilings
- Kitchen
- Lighting grid
- Noise friendly (evenings/week-ends only)
- Private space
- Sound system
- Sprung floor
- Street entrance
- Temperature control
- Wifi
- Windows/natural light

Type of space

artist studio, office, theatre



3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

commongroundarts.ca

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

About

Based in Edmonton, Alberta, and founded in 2009, Common Ground Arts Society is a multidisciplinary arts presenter that champions inclusivity and dismantles barriers in the arts. Through inventive development programs, artist mentorship, and bold presentation opportunities, Common Ground empowers creators at every stage of their careers to take risks, tell ambitious stories, and build lasting community connections.

Anchored by process-driven initiatives like Found Festival and RISER Edmonton, the organization supports over 100 artists annually across disciplines. With a strong commitment to care-first practices and creative experimentation, Common Ground envisions an arts ecosystem where historical exclusions are replaced by a

richly diverse landscape, one that prioritizes access, equity, and transformation. Guided by the question “*what else is possible?*”, Common Ground continues to serve as one of Edmonton’s most inclusive and adaptive creative platforms.

Their space story

In Edmonton, a city known for its vibrant Fringe culture and do-it-yourself creative way of working, artistic ingenuity thrives. But that same energy often comes with constraints. Artists are frequently limited by space that favours small-scale, feasibility-driven work, and by the pressure to be constantly “presentable.” This has created an environment where many creatives are forced to keep their ambitions modest, pursuing what’s logistically manageable rather than what’s creatively possible.

Space Story Snapshot

Partnership contribution

\$20,000

Relationship to Why Not Theatre

We have worked with Common Ground Arts Society for a number of years as they were part of the first pilot that expanded RISER project’s collaborative producing model nationally. They continue to steward this model with great success, creating meaningful opportunities for emerging voices and ensuring that artists can develop new work without bearing the financial burden personally.

Through programs like RISER Edmonton, Common Ground is creating not just physical space, but mental and creative space, freeing artists from the burden of high rental costs, and empowering them to take the kind of risks that elevate their practice. By removing the logistical barriers of space access, the organization is effectively shifting artists out of a “producer brain” and back into an “artist brain.” The result is work that is bolder, more innovative, and more authentic.

“With less budgetary focus on space rental, productions can increase artist fees and production budgets. This will lead to innovation and allow artists such as myself to dream bigger and go further with creative processes.”

— ARTIST RESPONDENT

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

commongroundarts.ca

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

What we learned by working with them and the artists they engaged

Based on conversations facilitated by Mary during her visit to Edmonton, powerful insights emerged from artists participating in RISER Edmonton about the role of accessible, no-cost space in their creative environment. These reflections, gathered through direct engagement with the artists and community, highlight how space access is a catalyst for artistic ambition, equity, and sustainability. The key learnings below reflect how RISER's space offerings fundamentally shift the conditions under which artists create and collaborate

Key Learning #1

Free and Accessible Space Is Foundational to Artistic Equity and Innovation

The financial burden of renting rehearsal and performance venues limits not only the amount of art makers can create, but also who gets to participate in the artistic ecosystem. Removing this barrier would:

- Foster artistic experimentation and the creation of new work without financial risk.
- Enable equitable participation from marginalized groups, particularly disabled, BIPOC, youth, and low-income artists.

Space Story Snapshot

- Reduce the need to tailor work to funders' expectations, allowing for more authentic creative expression.
- Enhance diversity and accessibility in audience engagement by allowing funds to be redirected to access tools (e.g., sensory kits, ASL interpreters, relaxed performances).

Key Learning #2

Free Space Cultivates Sustainable Professional Growth and Stronger Communities

Access to free space is also shown to contribute significantly to artists' personal and professional development. It was shared that:

- The ability to plan longer, lower-pressure rehearsal processes that accommodate part-time schedules and caregiving responsibilities.
- A decrease in grant-writing stress and an increase in meaningful artistic and audience-focused practices.
- Enhanced opportunities for collaboration, relationship-building, and community formation.
- Redistribution of funds toward fair wages, accessibility, and technical/artistic enhancements, which ultimately uplift the overall quality of work.

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

Space Story Snapshot

oncueregina.ca

Space name

mâwawêyatitân centre

Timeframe

March 2025–May 2025

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix



3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

oncueregina.ca

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix



Space Story Snapshot

Space name

mâdawêyatitân centre

Timeframe

March 2025–May 2025

Space model

temporary space

Type of space

artist studio, office, theatre

Amenities

- Accessible building
- Accessible by transit
- Accessible washroom
- Bike rack
- Chairs & tables
- Close to amenities
- Drinking water
- Fire extinguisher
- First aid kit
- Gender neutral washroom
- High ceilings
- Kitchen
- Meeting rooms
- Mirrors
- Noise friendly (evenings/week-ends only)
- Onsite storage
- Parking
- Projector surface
- Security
- Shared space
- Shower
- Smudge friendly
- Sound system
- Street entrance
- Wifi
- Windows/natural light



3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

Space Story Snapshot

oncueregina.ca

Space name

Northgate Mall, Unit 78

Timeframe

March 2025–May 2025

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix



3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

oncueregina.ca

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix



Space Story Snapshot

Space name

Northgate Mall, Unit 78

Timeframe

September 2024–March 2025

Space model

meanwhile space

Type of space

storefront

Amenities

- 24/7 access
- Accessible building
- Accessible by transit
- Accessible washroom
- Chairs & tables
- Close to amenities
- Fire extinguisher
- High ceilings
- Lighting grid
- Noise friendly (evenings/week-ends only)
- Onsite storage
- Parking
- Private space
- Street entrance
- Washroom
- Windows/natural light



3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

Space Story Snapshot

oncueregina.ca

Space name

Scarth Street Studio

Timeframe

September 2024–November 2024

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix



3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

oncueregina.ca

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix



Space Story Snapshot

Space name

Scarth Street Studio

Timeframe

September 2024–November 2024

Space model

meanwhile space

Amenities

- 24/7 access
- Accessible by transit
- Chairs & tables
- Close to amenities
- Drinking water
- Fire extinguisher
- First aid kit
- Gender neutral washroom
- Onsite storage
- Pet friendly
- Private space
- Projector surface
- Shared space
- Smudge friendly
- Sprung floor
- Street entrance
- Wifi
- Windows/natural light

Type of space

artist studio, recording studio, office



3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

Space Story Snapshot

oncueregina.ca

Space name

Schumiatcher Open Stage

Timeframe

September 2024–February 2025

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix



3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

oncueregina.ca

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix



Space Story Snapshot

Space name

Schumiatcher Open Stage,
University of Regina

Timeframe

September 2024–February 2025

Space model

temporary space

Amenities

- Accessible building
- Accessible by transit
- Accessible washroom
- Bike rack
- Chairs & tables
- Close to amenities
- Drinking water
- Fire extinguisher
- First aid kit
- Gender neutral washroom
- High ceilings
- Lighting grid
- Mirrors
- Noise friendly
- Parking
- Private space
- Projector surface
- Security
- Shared space
- Shower
- Sound system
- Sprung floor
- Street entrance
- Temperature control
- Wifi

Type of space

theatre



3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

oncueregina.ca

Space Story Snapshot

Partnership contribution

\$20,000

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

About

On Cue Performance Hub, Inc. is a Regina-based non-profit dedicated to making the performing arts a viable, visible, and valued part of everyday life. With a mission to strengthen Regina's performing arts community, On Cue supports independent artists and arts groups through mentorship, cooperative producing, professional development, and increased access to both physical and digital creative spaces.

Founded as an entrepreneurial start-up, On Cue is deeply committed to equity, sustainability, and innovation. The organization prioritizes support for BIPOC, newcomer, Deaf, disabled, and gender-diverse artists, working to ensure that Regina's creative landscape reflects the full diversity of its community. By expanding public engagement and championing artist-led

practices, On Cue envisions a vibrant performing arts ecosystem, one where artists of all backgrounds can thrive, connect with new audiences, and build sustainable creative careers.

Their space story

For On Cue Performance Hub, Inc., space is a catalyst for creativity, connection, and community resilience. Based in Regina, Saskatchewan, On Cue is committed to creating a performing arts ecosystem where artists can thrive, not only by developing new work, but by building relationships across disciplines, geographies, and communities.

One artist captured this vision clearly:

“When I don't have to pay for rehearsal space, I have the financial means to invest in people. That freedom attracts the

right community and over time, it builds resilience within the arts sector.”

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

That's exactly what On Cue's access to space enables. By offering free or low-barrier rehearsal and presentation space, including in unexpected locations like Regina's Northgate Mall, On Cue makes it possible for artists to create without the burden of rental costs and to share their work with a wider public. These spaces aren't just for closed-door rehearsals; they're inviting and visible, encouraging open rehearsals, community drop-ins, and performances that meet audiences where they are.

“Artists are connecting not just with each other, but with the broader community,” shared Mary Blackstone, Artistic Director. *“If they're going to earn a living from their creative work, they need that link and space helps forge it.”*

In a province where the cost of studio and stage time can be prohibitive, especially for independent artists, On Cue's approach offers something rare: a sustainable model for artistic growth that's grounded in equity and collaboration. The space itself becomes a kind of ecosystem, one that supports the creative process while strengthening social ties and enabling long-term planning.

Even with room for greater capacity, the space already serves as a bridge between artists and the city. Whether preparing a large-scale public performance or simply sharing ideas across kitchen tables and rehearsal floors, On Cue's model proves that when space is shared, supported, and visible, the whole community benefits.

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

oncueregina.ca

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

Relationship to Why Not Theatre

Like Common Ground Arts Society, On Cue was a partner in our national expansion of the RISER model, making their involvement in the continued evolution of the Space Project a natural progression. Our goal was to explore similar issues across diverse contexts, and partnering in Regina allowed us to highlight a community that is often underrepresented in national conversations.

What we learned by working with them and the artists they engaged

What emerged from the insights of artists working with On Cue Performance Hub, Inc. was a profound shift in artistic freedom, community belonging, and cultural inclusion. The offer of free, professional space transformed how artists approached risk, collaboration, and their own sustainability within Regina's growing creative ecosystem. Three key learnings surfaced that demonstrate the layered impacts of removing cost barriers and centering underrepresented voices in space access.

Key Learning #1

Access to Space Supports Artist Retention in the Sector

For immigrant and low-income artists, the economic realities of living and working in Canada, especially in under-resourced regions, can make sustaining an artistic career feel impossible. Free, reliable access to creative space isn't just a short-term boost; it can be the difference between staying in the arts or leaving the sector entirely. On Cue's model directly addresses this critical threshold by removing one of the most prohibitive financial barriers: space.

"I can confidently say that if it hadn't been for the support from On Cue, I would likely have moved into another industry, as many immigrants face significant economic challenges... It makes it difficult for low-income earners to thrive.

— ARTIST RESPONDENT

Key Learning #2

Space Isn't Just Where Art Happens, It Shapes How It Happens

In Regina, the Space Project revealed that artists don't just use space, they respond to it. When space is freely given, repurposed, and reimaged from shopping malls to maker studios, community centers to cultural hubs, it becomes a formative influence on artistic expression, process, and audience engagement. These non-traditional venues invite artists to think beyond the stage or studio, cultivating new practices of public interaction, interdisciplinary creation, and community-rooted storytelling.

"This was the first time I realized a space could not only help create art but also influence the way it impacts the community afterward."

— ARTIST RESPONDENT

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

Space Story Snapshot

oncueregina.ca

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

Key Learning #3:

Space Cultivates Belonging, Not Just Access

Artists emphasized that the most transformative spaces didn't just make room for their work, they made room for them. By prioritizing inclusion, community-building, and care-first practices, the Space Project helped foster a sense of creative belonging that many artists had never experienced in more institutional settings.

“Creative freedom and community are two essentials for me... When that freedom is achieved, it attracts the right community that shares similar values, ultimately creating a space that is inclusive and welcoming to all, without prejudice.”

— ARTIST RESPONDENT

3.6 SURmUN

Space Story Snapshot

surmun.my.canva.site

Space name

SURmUN Studio

Timeframe

October 2024–March 2025

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix



3.6 SURmUN

Space Story Snapshot

surmun.my.canva.site

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix



Space name

SURmUN Studio

Space model

temporary space

Type of space

artist studio, industrial, office, recording studio

Timeframe

October 2024–March 2025

Amenities

- 24/7 access
- Accessible building
- Accessible by transit
- Accessible washroom
- Bike rack
- Chairs & tables
- Concrete floor
- Fire extinguisher
- First aid kit
- Gender neutral washroom
- High ceilings
- Mirrors
- Noise friendly
- Parking
- Private space
- Sound system
- Street entrance
- Temperature control
- Wifi
- Windows/natural light



3.6 SURmUN

surmun.my.canva.site

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

About

Based in Hamilton’s historic Cotton Factory, SURmUN Studio is a home for musical experimentation, connection, and care. Founded by musician and interdisciplinary artist Gurpreet Chana, the studio is best known for its ongoing initiative *Come As You Are* (#caya), a weekly, midday live music gathering that invites people to connect through sound, free of pressure, payment, or performance.

At its core, SURmUN is about access and presence. By transforming everyday spaces, sidewalks, studios, cafés, and co-working lobbies into spontaneous sites of shared musical experience, the studio challenges conventional notions of who gets to engage with live music and when. What began as a question of accessibility has become a gentle, ongoing disruption: a practice of offering music as a public good rather

than a gated commodity.

Through its work, SURmUN Studio nurtures reconnection to creativity, to community, and to the artist within, reminding us that live music can be ordinary, extraordinary, and for everyone.

Their space story

SURmUN Studio is located on the campus of the Cotton Factory in Hamilton, Ontario, a hub of over 140 tenants including artists, light industrial workers, designers, and creatives of all kinds. But SURmUN occupies something special: a 600-square-foot standalone building within this larger complex. And that distinction matters.

When artist Gurpreet Chana first encountered the space in 2023, he was told by the landlord that they were looking specifically for a musician of colour to rent it. That kind of intentionality, centering artistic

Space Story Snapshot

Partnership contribution

\$12,000

don’t even know who’s going to show up. But in that hour, people make space for each other, across personalities, moods, and mindsets. It becomes a we place, not a me place.”

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

While Gurpreet often works alone in his studio, *Come As You Are* opens up a shared rhythm where the unexpected becomes the essential, and community is built not through programming, but through presence.

SURmUN Studio is a reminder that the spaces artists inhabit are not just containers for work, but vessels for belonging, reorientation, and collective resonance. It is a deeply personal space with a wide social reach. One that doesn’t just welcome artists, but calls them in.

practice and representation, is rare in the world of studio rentals. For Gurpreet, it was more than a rental opportunity; it was a meaningful invitation to return to Hamilton, the city where he grew up, where his community remains, and where his family helped build one of the local Gurdwaras. In his words, it was “a bit of a homecoming.”

What has emerged within the space is more than a personal practice. SURmUN Studio also hosts *Come As You Are*, a weekly mid-day gathering that’s been running in various forms for over a decade. From 12:30 to 1:30 p.m. every Wednesday, musicians, artists, and guests come together to share live music with no cover, no hierarchy, and no expectations. It is not a performance. It is a space of mutual presence, vulnerability, and emergence.

“Sometimes we don’t know who’s going to start. Sometimes we

3.6 SURmUN

surmun.my.canva.site

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

Relationship to Why Not Theatre

Like Rajni, Gurpreet is an internationally acclaimed artist with whom we have had the privilege of collaborating with for over a decade. His dedication to advancing his field through innovative work, coupled with his commitment to cultivating truly creative spaces for exchange and dialogue, made him a natural fit for this project.

What we learned by working with them and the artists they engaged

The *Come As You Are* initiative at SURmUN Studio demonstrates how free, welcoming, and improvisational space can transform both artistic practice and community connection. Artists described the studio as a site of identity reclamation, collective trust-building, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and even a social revolution against commodification. This space served as a catalyst for personal restoration, creative risk-taking, and new-found relationships.

Key Learning #1

Space Reclaims Identity

Free and welcoming creative space helped some artists reconnect with their core identity as creators, partners, and friends. For one artist navigating their partner's dementia, *Come As You Are* offered the rare chance to reconnect emotionally and artistically with their loved one.

"In that space, we get to be friends, artists, lovers... we can remember, 'oh right, this is who we are.'"

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

"It's been a joy, and has lifted what has felt like the weight of the world from my shoulders as a caregiver, reminding me of the gift of my practice."

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

This highlights how space is a site for relationship repair and personal restoration, especially for artists navigating caregiving or health-related barriers.

Key Learning #2

Improvisational Space Builds Community and Restores Creative Confidence

SURmUN Studio cultivates attentiveness, trust, and ensemble spirit. This allows both seasoned and emerging artists to take creative risks, collaborate without hierarchy, and focus on presence rather than outcome.

"We're doing that thing, which is the essence of ensemble theatre artists, which is about 'we.' It is about the ensemble. It's about all of us."

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

This commitment to process over perfection helps artists feel safe enough to experiment, make mistakes, and grow creatively. For many, this was described as a sacred space, where ego was set aside and mutual respect reigned.

surmun.my.canva.site

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

Key Learning #3

Free Access to Space Fuels Interdisciplinary Collaboration and Artistic Cross-Pollination

Multiple artists emphasized that having open, no-cost access to SURmUN Studio encouraged serendipitous collaboration across genres and disciplines. Musicians jammed with visual artists; improvisers inspired designers; non-artists felt welcome to explore.

“Creative freedom and community are two essentials for me... That freedom attracts the right community.”

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

Key Learning #4

Space as a Social Revolution Beyond Commodification

One artist called *Come As You Are* a “small necessary piece of revolution.” Artists described the space as a weekly reminder that art is inherently social, not something to be confined by markets or rigid structures.

“The sessions are like musical yoga... a reminder that art, at its core, is beyond commodification.”

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

3.7 Terrarium

Space Story Snapshot

terrariumstudio.cargo.site

Space name

Terrarium Studio

Timeframe

September 2024–March 2025

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix



3.7 Terrarium

terrariumstudio.cargo.site



Space Story Snapshot

Space name

Terrarium Studio

Timeframe

September 2024–March 2025

Space model

temporary space

Amenities

- Accessible by transit
- Chairs & tables
- Close to amenities
- Drinking water
- Fire extinguisher
- First aid kit
- Gender neutral washroom
- Kitchen
- Noise friendly
- Onsite storage
- Private space
- Shared space
- Smudge friendly
- Sound system
- Temperature control
- Wifi
- Windows/natural light

Type of space

artist studio



00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

3.7 Terrarium

terrariumstudio.cargo.site

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

About

Located in Toronto's West End, the Terrarium cooperative studio responds to change and scarcity in the local art infrastructure. Terrarium is home to a visual arts fabrication studio, a healing arts studio, DIY music studio, and host programs run by Cue Arts Projects, Capsules Artist Resources Inc, and TQMC.

Together, Terrarium explores models that create organic meeting places between community-driven ideas and initiatives that prioritize communal health, cooperation, and interconnected artist-led efforts for sustainable practices.

As a cooperative studio rooted in DIY ethics, Terrarium supports low income, racialized, and gender diverse artists by providing affordable workspace and opportunities in an intergenerational setting. Their partnerships are centred around

advocating for the integrity of creative people in Toronto.

Their space story

Terrarium is more than a physical space; it's a container for possibility, particularly for artists who have historically been excluded from traditional institutions. Co-founded by artists Zanette Singh and Eli Howey, Terrarium was built from the ground up with a vision of supporting trans, DIY, and emergent artists who don't see themselves in the conventional art world. From the beginning, the goal was to dream up a structure that would hold artists gently, share knowledge horizontally, and let creative work grow without gatekeeping.

Located in Toronto, Ontario, Terrarium offers free artist residencies specifically for trans artists, along with a materials

Space Story Snapshot

Partnership contribution

\$20,000

stipend, mentorship, and deeply relational support. Zanette and Eli bring decades of lived experience in alternative art spaces from zines and bands to underground galleries and community organizing, and they've infused Terrarium with the ethos of that world: mutual aid, flexibility, and radical trust.

"It changed the way I look at my work. It changed the way I think about myself as an artist. It allowed me to take up space in a way I never had in my life."

— ARTIST RESPONDENT

At Terrarium, artists are treated as professionals. Many enter without formal training, but with something vital to say, and here, they're given the room and affirmation to say it. The space itself operates less like an institution and more like a conversation: artists are invited to drop by, ask questions, explore, and evolve. And by the

end of each residency cycle, many are invited into major public exhibitions, standing shoulder to shoulder with peers and mentors in a celebration of voice, presence, and creative legitimacy.

As Eli puts it, "We dreamt up the container, and now we get to watch it do the thing." That "thing" is hard to name; it's mentorship without hierarchy, community without pressure, infrastructure without rigidity. It's the quiet revolution that happens when marginalized artists are offered not just space, but belief.

3.7 Terrarium

terrariumstudio.cargo.site

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

Relationship to Why Not Theatre

This partnership emerged at exactly the right time for all of us. Zanette and Eli are deeply respected in their community for their longstanding work in uplifting queer and trans artists. Our connection with them was serendipitous, coming at a pivotal moment when they were preparing to take on significant personal risk to establish an essential space for queer and trans communities.

What we learned by working with them and the artists they engaged

The insights gathered from artists who accessed space through Terrarium reveal how critical it is to reimagine what creative infrastructure can look like—especially when it’s rooted in community care, accessibility, and queer-led organizing. Beyond simply offering a place to work, Terrarium became a site of stability, experimentation, mutual aid, and emotional safety. These reflections offer a powerful case for why free and inclusive art spaces are not just helpful, but necessary for sustaining meaningful creative practice.

Key Learning #1

Space Stabilizes Artistic Practice and Builds Momentum

Artists repeatedly shared that having consistent, cost-free access to a dedicated studio allowed them to establish routines, gain momentum, and plan longer-term projects. Without the pressure of commercial studio fees, they were free to create, revise, and explore in ways that deepened their practice and strengthened their career path.

“Studio space allowed me to work consistently, which means I have momentum and it stabilized my practice.”

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

Key Learning #2

Space Creates Shared Learning and Mentorship Across Experience Levels

Terrarium’s shared studio model fosters intergenerational and cross-disciplinary learning. Artists consistently named how valuable it was to work alongside peers and more established creatives. Informal mentorship, feedback, and collaboration all became daily practices.

“I learned so many random tips and skills from more experienced artists.”

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

“Any question that came up—we would discuss and brainstorm... I had a conversation that day that changed how I view my own practice.”

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

3.7 Terrarium

Space Story Snapshot

terrariumstudio.cargo.site

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

3.1 Aluna Theatre

3.2 ArtsBuild Ontario

3.3 Capsules Artist Resources Inc.

3.4 Common Ground Arts Society

3.5 On Cue Performance Hub, Inc.

3.6 SURmUN

3.7 Terrarium

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

Key Learning #3

Space Nourishes Queer Joy, Safety, and Collective Healing

Terrarium was especially meaningful as a queer-centered space where artists felt safe, held, and uplifted. It fostered a sense of belonging that counteracted the loneliness and marginalization many artists experience in traditional or competitive art spaces.

“Being a visual artist is really hard and lonely... This really makes going to the studio easy and fun.”

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

“Being held and uplifted by my community makes my quality of life amazing.”

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

“I feel safer in an LGBT+ space to sing, develop ideas that are not

polished or edited and be seen/accepted on a day-to-day basis.”

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

The space modelled an affirming and anti-extractive alternative to mainstream institutions, where artists could bring their full selves without fear of judgment or erasure.

Key Learning #4

Administrative and Peer Support Are as Vital as Studio Time

One of Terrarium’s greatest assets wasn’t just the physical space; it was the community infrastructure that came with it. Artists highlighted how crucial it was to have “art admin” days, shared meals, and conversations about long-term planning, fundraising, and artistic survival.

“It’s like a random Tuesday afternoon... and there’s 5 queer artists meeting up to work on applications, grants, and whatever stuff they’ve been avoiding... We all just do the hard thing together.”

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

“Normally these things happen alone, no group feedback... it made me feel so hopeful in a way I hadn’t felt in a long time.”

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

ARTISTS: WHAT WE HEARD

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

4.1 Space as Catalyst for
Artistic Depth and Risk

4.2 Space for Financial
Reimagining

4.3 Space as Validation, Career
Building, and Belonging

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

4.1 Space as

Catalyst for Artistic Depth and Risk

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

4.1 Space as Catalyst for Artistic Depth and Risk

4.2 Space for Financial Reimagining

4.3 Space as Validation, Career Building, and Belonging

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

Across dozens of testimonials, artists consistently described how access to space reshaped their capacity to **experiment, slow down, collaborate ethically, and deepen their craft.** In many cases, the space itself became an active agent in the creative process.

Unpressured Time Enables Artistic Evolution

Artists highlighted the shift from transactional, deadline-driven creation to a more expansive and iterative approach. Freed from rental fees and institutional timelines, they were able to enter rehearsal, development, and exploratory phases without the usual constraints.

“I could focus more on the work and not worry about the budget... My work could breathe more... I could explore with play, without worrying about being ‘effective.’”

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

“We didn’t know how much could happen in a week until we actually had that time. It was transformative.”

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

Spaces as Labs for Experimentation

The spaces were frequently described not as venues for finished products, but as “**sandboxes**” or “**labs**” where lighting, projection, movement, costumes, and audience interaction could be prototyped early and iteratively. This allowed artists to approach their work with a sense of play and discovery rather than pressure and polish.

“The studio became a professional sandbox. We could test design elements and conduct full-costume fittings with collaborators on site.”

– ARTIST RESPONDENT

This technical access, often taken for granted in more privileged production contexts was pivotal for artists seeking to integrate multimedia, choreography, and live

performance. The result was more cohesive, rigorous, and expressive work.

Importantly, during one of the sensemaking sessions, a collective insight emerged: offering space must also create room for failure. We discussed the need to actively honour failure as an integral part of creative processes, rather than viewing it as a misstep. When failure is seen as data, not defeat, artists are more likely to take risks that lead to genuine innovation.

“How do we encourage artists to try and fail and take risks without the goal of perfection?”

– PARTNER RESPONDENT

This ethos redefines success as the courage to explore, test, revise, and sometimes abandon ideas. Free space, then, becomes more than just a cost-saving tool, it becomes a container for →

4.1 Space as

Catalyst for Artistic Depth and Risk

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

4.1 Space as Catalyst for Artistic Depth and Risk

4.2 Space for Financial Reimagining

4.3 Space as Validation, Career Building, and Belonging

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

curiosity, where misfires are just as valued as breakthroughs.

Risk-Taking Without Financial Penalty

By eliminating rental fees, the project neutralized one of the most entrenched barriers to creative experimentation: the cost of failure. Artists were encouraged to try ambitious, unconventional, or multilayered work that might not have otherwise been feasible.

“I could take more creative risks and do more projects. I organized an extensive three-stage audition process, something I could never afford before.”

— ARTIST RESPONDENT

Notably, the freedom to “fail forward” helped artists refine their ideas without the pressure to justify every use of time through output.

Spaces that Inspire Form and Theme

Many artists reported that the physical, cultural, and emotional characteristics of the space directly influenced the tone, structure, or content of their work. From mall atriums to Indigenous community centers, the environment became a collaborator.

“The space itself influences the themes and energy of our work. Its history, sound, and feel became part of our final piece.”

— ARTIST RESPONDENT

“Being in a culturally rooted space like the māmawêyatitân centre deepened our work. It’s not just about sound and lighting it’s about how a space holds the story you’re trying to tell.”

— ARTIST RESPONDENT

These insights affirm that space is not neutral. It carries

resonances and potentials that shape the trajectory and impact of the art itself.

From Survival to Artistic Thriving

Artists were explicit: without this space, much of the work wouldn’t have existed or would have suffered from underdevelopment. The project, then, did more than enable practice. It transformed potential into presence.

“Without this space, the work would probably never exist or would be under-rehearsed and suffer creatively... Quality time in the studio led to breakthroughs I never anticipated.”

— ARTIST RESPONDENT

The evidence is clear: when artists are trusted with time, space, and autonomy, they create richer, more honest, and more technically

sophisticated work. The Space Project repositions space not as a luxury or favour, but as essential infrastructure for equity-driven, high-caliber cultural production.

As one artist summarized:

“It’s not just about having a room—it’s about what becomes possible when you’re finally allowed to fully imagine.”

4.2 Space as

Financial Reimagining

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

4.1 Space as Catalyst for Artistic Depth and Risk

4.2 Space for Financial Reimagining

4.3 Space as Validation, Career Building, and Belonging

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

This section captures how the Space Project has not only alleviated financial pressure, but restructured economic flows, reimagined artist sustainability, and challenged traditional arts funding paradigms. Artists describe a shift from scarcity and precarity to resource redistribution, ethical compensation, professional leverage, and systemic relief.

Redistribution as Part of the Creative Practice

Nearly a third of artist respondents explicitly mentioned that cost savings from free space allowed them to **fairly compensate collaborators**, often for the first time. This redistribution of resources away from rental fees and toward people transformed not only how the work was made, but how it felt to make it.

“We were able to pay our collaborators their full rate. That alone changed the energy in the room. It made the whole experience more generous and fulfilling.”

— ARTIST RESPONDENT

“Our funds could be directed to all the artists working on the project... It created a sense of ‘home’ where we could get our best work done.”

— ARTIST RESPONDENT

By redirecting financial value back into the hands of artists, the model supported ethical labour, sustained engagement, and more equitable creative working relationships. Redistribution here was not just an economic shift, it was a creative and cultural one, deepening trust and raising the bar for artistic quality.

Access That Unlocks Economic Opportunity

Space is not only a cost-saving mechanism, it’s a launchpad for economic mobility. Artists were able to produce work at a higher standard, apply for funding, document processes, and build portfolios that translated into future bookings.

“We now have a presentation that can tour schools and organizations, generating future bookings.”

— ARTIST RESPONDENT

“This project helped me feel confident enough to apply for funding. I now see how to move forward as an independent artist.”

— ARTIST RESPONDENT

Economic Relief as Creative Freedom

Freed from working multiple jobs or scrambling for space, artists reported renewed capacity to focus, reflect, and take risks. Financial ease became creative permission.

“I don’t know how I could have done this without free space... I would’ve had to work extra hours just to afford one or two rehearsals.”

— ARTIST RESPONDENT

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

4.1 Space as Catalyst for
Artistic Depth and Risk4.2 Space for Financial
Reimagining4.3 Space as Validation, Career
Building, and Belonging

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

From Grant Dependency to Investment Framing

During sensemaking, partners voiced the need to shift language and psychology in how space is offered and valued from charity-based models to creative investment frameworks. Free space wasn't framed as a donation; it was seen as essential cultural infrastructure with exponential returns.

This signals a sectoral reimagining: not just supporting art, but structuring economic conditions that make sustainable creative lives possible.

Measurable Savings, Immense Value

Artists reported concrete financial savings from hundreds to tens of thousands of dollars annually. These figures, while

stark, only tell part of the story. The true value lies in what that saved money made possible: deeper rehearsals, ethical pay, archival documentation, audience development, and self-determination.

- Estimated session savings: \$100–\$500
- Annual savings for ongoing users: \$2,000–\$12,000+
- Highest estimate: \$40,000 annually

4.3 Space as

Validation, Career Building, and Belonging

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

4.1 Space as Catalyst for Artistic Depth and Risk

4.2 Space for Financial Reimagining

4.3 Space as Validation, Career Building, and Belonging

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

The theme of Space as Validation, Career Building, and Belonging emerges as one of the most powerful and recurrent threads in the insights gathered from artists. Access to space functioned as a form of emotional and professional recognition, an invitation for artists to see themselves and be seen as legitimate and valued members of the creative community. This validation often came with permission to self-identify as artists, especially for those without formal training or institutional affiliation. Many described how the experience helped erode imposter syndrome, open up career traction through increased visibility, and strengthen a sense of confidence and belonging through shared environments.

Space as Emotional and Artistic Validation

Artists repeatedly described the emotional power of being invited into a space, not just physically, but symbolically. Access functioned as a kind of permission to self-identify as an artist, particularly for those historically excluded from institutional support.

“It changed the way I think about myself as an artist. I feel worthy and capable... I now feel confident to create intricate, large-scale works.”

— ARTIST RESPONDENT

“In that space, I felt seen. It wasn’t just about the work, it was about being reminded of who I am as a creative person. That grounded me.”

— ARTIST RESPONDENT

“As an artist without formal training, I never felt like I

belonged in certain spaces. Here, I found freedom to learn, create, and imagine on my terms.”

— ARTIST RESPONDENT

Space in this project became a gesture of affirmation, challenging gatekeeping norms and inviting artists to take themselves seriously.

Counteracting Isolation and Imposter Syndrome

For many, space acted as an antidote to years of isolation and doubt. It counteracted imposter syndrome, created peer visibility, and supported collective energy that helped artists reconnect to their craft and creative identity.

“It’s been helping me through imposter syndrome after working my entire career from home.”

— ARTIST RESPONDENT

“I felt seen. I wasn’t just in a space, I was in a space that welcomed my voice. I created things I didn’t even know I had in me.”

— ARTIST RESPONDENT

“Being held and uplifted by my community makes my quality of life amazing. The works I’m creating now are embodiments of that reality.”

— ARTIST RESPONDENT

A Launchpad for Visibility and Career Growth

For many artists, access to space marked a pivotal turning point in their professional lives. With the ability to rehearse, produce, document, and refine work in a dedicated environment, artists gained not only stronger portfolios but also the confidence and legitimacy needed to pursue opportunities more assertively. →

4.3 Space as

Validation, Career Building, and Belonging

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

4.1 Space as Catalyst for Artistic Depth and Risk

4.2 Space for Financial Reimagining

4.3 Space as Validation, Career Building, and Belonging

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

The availability of space translated into professional traction, helping artists apply for funding, build promotional materials, and step into public artistic roles with clarity and conviction.

“I walked out of the space with video footage, high-res promo materials, and a show I can now pitch to schools and festivals. It changed my professional trajectory.”

— ARTIST RESPONDENT

“These spaces give me confidence to approach presenters and funders as a serious artist. I have something real to show.”

— ARTIST RESPONDENT

This growth was especially profound in regions where arts infrastructure is limited or underfunded. In these contexts, consistent access to space offered rare visibility, legitimacy, and a sense of

professional belonging. Artists stepped into the public sphere of their practice with newfound assurance.

“Having this shared studio downtown has quite rapidly changed my career... I get to be in the city center where people now know me.”

— ARTIST RESPONDENT

In this way, the project created conditions for artists to be seen, respected, and professionally positioned within and beyond their communities.

Ultimately, what emerged most powerfully from this section was that belonging is not a byproduct of space, it is cultivated within it. Through shared studios, informal gatherings, and spontaneous peer exchanges, artists found themselves part of relational ecosystems where support, visibility, and inspiration flowed organically. The project reminded us that building an

artistic life is as much about being in the room with others as it is about the work itself and that the feeling of being held, seen, and accompanied can be just as vital to a career as any grant or performance.

BEYOND SPACE:

Gaps, Tensions and Unfinished Business

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

05 Beyond Space

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

While the Space Project has demonstrated the transformative power of access, artists and partners also surfaced a deeper truth: **free space alone is not enough.** Many of the systemic barriers that artists face: economic, emotional, infrastructural, and cultural persist beyond the doorway of an available room. What was revealed through this initiative was not only what worked, but what remains fragile, uneven, or incomplete.

Accessibility Is Not a Guarantee

Even as access to space has expanded, it has not always equated to meaningful accessibility. Artists pointed out physical barriers (like stairs and the lack of elevators), alongside sensory, cultural, and emotional exclusions. An artist emphasized that, “having access to a space doesn’t mean it works for everyone. Cultural safety, sensory needs, and physical accessibility all matter too.”

These experiences reveal a tension between availability and approachability. Without intentional design and inclusive infrastructure, free space risks replicating the exclusions it seeks to address. As one insight put it, “some of our best spaces are also the least accessible. That contradiction needs to be addressed for true equity.”

Gaps, Tensions and Unfinished Business

The Limits of Unstructured Freedom

Artists appreciated the flexibility of the model, but some also shared that freedom without guidance could feel unanchored. Especially for emerging or isolated artists, the lack of light-touch mentorship or creative facilitation sometimes led to confusion or underused time. One artist remarked, “the space was free and flexible, but we struggled to set goals, plan timelines, and use the time effectively.” Another reflected, “having space doesn’t always mean you know what to do with it. Some kind of creative facilitation or framework would help artists use it meaningfully.”

This suggests a need to balance autonomy with gentle structure or scaffolding, roles like cultural workers, artist-coaches, or creative producers who can help translate space into momentum.

Who Feels Entitled to Be There?

Even when barriers are removed, not all artists feel entitled to step forward. Historical exclusions such as racism, ableism, transphobia, class bias don’t vanish with a free room. One reflection captured this clearly:

“It’s not just about making the space free, it’s about inviting those who don’t see themselves in it.”

Free space without explicit invitation, welcome, or affirmation can leave artists in a limbo between access and belonging. Belonging must be nurtured, not assumed.

05 Beyond Space

Gaps, Tensions and Unfinished Business

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

Burnout, Precarity, and the Need for Sustainability

Many artists and partners also named fatigue, burnout, and precarity as ongoing concerns, especially in under-resourced regions or for artist-organizers balancing multiple roles. One artist put it plainly:

“Artists are burnt out. We work multiple jobs, take care of each other, and fill systemic gaps... Without policy-level change, we’re still scrambling.”

There is a tension between one-time access and long-term stability. As one company noted, “This worked for us once, but can we count on it again? That uncertainty makes it hard to build long-term projects.”

The model offers relief, but not yet reliability. Without committed investment from cities, funders, and institutions, this promising infrastructure may remain precarious and patchwork.

Space Alone Is Not the Whole Support System

Artists also highlighted the absence of technical, administrative, and community support, which are essential for realizing ambitious work. “I didn’t have to worry about finding space,” one artist said, “but I still had to find people with tech skills, manage setup, and market the event. Free space alone isn’t enough without administrative and technical support.”

From missing projectors and sound systems to a lack of guidance around audience building and funding, artists underscored the need for space to be part of a holistic ecosystem, one that includes tools, people, and pathways for sustainable creation.

FUTURE PATHWAYS

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

6.1 Summary of Outcomes

6.2 Recommendations for
Sector Transformation

6.3 Next Steps for the Space
Project

07 Appendix

What artists surfaced through this project are not only the benefits of space, but the conditions that must accompany it to truly support equity, creative risk, and career longevity. If space is to serve as infrastructure and not just intervention then questions of access, care, and sustainability must remain at the centre of future design. The work is not done. But it is clearer now where attention is needed and how artists themselves are shaping the blueprint for what comes next.

6.1 Summary of Outcomes

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

6.1 Summary of Outcomes

6.2 Recommendations for Sector Transformation

6.3 Next Steps for the Space Project

07 Appendix

Over the course of this initiative, the project surfaced clear evidence that space catalyzes creative risk-taking, artistic belonging, financial reallocation, and deeper sectoral equity. Through artist surveys, Photovoice, partner reflections, and embedded relational methods, this project revealed the breadth and depth of what space makes possible:

Creative Expansion

Artists used their time and space to slow down, test new ideas, and develop more ambitious and technically sophisticated work. Space acted as both container and collaborator.

Redistributed Resources

Free access to space allowed artists to redirect limited funds toward fair compensation, shifting practices toward more equitable and professional working conditions.

Emotional and Career Validation

Space was experienced as an invitation into legitimacy. Many artists reported significant boosts in confidence, visibility, and self-identification as artists, especially those from marginalized or non-institutionalized backgrounds.

Community Formation

Shared studio environments, informal exchanges, and horizontal peer learning cultivated relational ecosystems that supported not only projects, but people.

Belonging Beyond Access

Artists described space as an affirmation of presence, not just a resource, but a recognition of worth. Where invitation and care were intentionally built into space access, artists reported higher levels of emotional safety and creative risk-taking.

Local Innovation Across Venues

Each participating venue activated space differently based on their own community contexts. These diverse models collectively demonstrated that place-based adaptability and relational governance are more effective than one-size-fits-all delivery models.

Ultimately, what emerged was a reframing of space as infrastructure: a site of cultural production, economic redistribution, and civic belonging—not just a backdrop for artistic activity, but a necessary precondition for it.

6.2 Recommendations for Sector Transformation

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

6.1 Summary of Outcomes

6.2 Recommendations for Sector Transformation

6.3 Next Steps for the Space Project

07 Appendix

Based on the rich body of insights from artists and partners, the following recommendations outline a path forward for institutions, funders, municipalities, and cultural organizations:

1. Fund Space as Essential Infrastructure

Treat access to creative space as a core component of cultural investment. Space should be understood as essential infrastructure for the creation, sharing, and sustainability of art, particularly for artists who face systemic barriers to access.

- Integrate space provision into public funding mandates by embedding expectations for equitable space access into multi-year operational grants, capital investments, and infrastructure support programs.
- Incentivize and support existing arts organizations that receive public funding to open their spaces to artists and groups who lack physical infrastructure. This could include:
 - › Dedicated funds to subsidize free or low-cost rentals
 - › Capacity-building support to help organizations manage open access programs
 - › Evaluation frameworks that reward sharing, hosting, and community-rooted practices
 - › Grants that prioritize or reward inter-organizational partnerships for space sharing
- Encourage a culture of space stewardship among publicly funded institutions. Those with physical assets such as performance venues, studios, galleries, and rehearsal halls should be empowered and equipped to act as hosts and collaborators, not gatekeepers. This includes building transparent access processes, ensuring cultural safety, and actively inviting underrepresented artists and groups into their spaces.

- Support knowledge sharing across institutions to scale successful models. Regard one of this project's partners as living case studies and reach out to them to understand how organizations have effectively shared space, navigated logistical and relational challenges, and sustained open-access initiatives.

6.2 Recommendations for Sector Transformation

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

6.1 Summary of Outcomes

6.2 Recommendations for Sector Transformation

6.3 Next Steps for the Space Project

07 Appendix

2. Design for Belonging, Not Just Access

- Move beyond physical availability to culturally and emotionally safe space design.
- Co-create orientation protocols, welcome rituals, and community agreements that explicitly invite underrepresented artists.
- Ensure artists are not only consulted, but co-designing the systems meant to serve them.

3. Pair Space with Structural Supports

- Provide light-touch scaffolding, such as creative facilitation, grant coaching, technical mentorship, and peer networks.
- Recognize that space is most powerful when accompanied by the tools, time, and relationships that turn potential into sustained practice.
- Avoid over-professionalization; develop informal and community-rooted models that prioritize access over polish.

4. Develop a Shared Language Around Value

- Shift narratives from charity or one-time relief to investment framing: space as a multiplier of cultural, economic, and social returns.
- Normalize “failure-forward” approaches to risk-taking, where space enables experimentation without pressure.

By integrating these recommendations, the arts sector can move beyond reactive space provision toward sustainable systems of support that recognize the full humanity, labour, and potential of artists across Canada.

6.3 Next Steps for the Space Project

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

6.1 Summary of Outcomes

6.2 Recommendations for Sector Transformation

6.3 Next Steps for the Space Project

07 Appendix

By engaging in this research, Why Not Theatre has compiled a case for support for funding bodies to embrace new ways of investing in independent artists and arts organizations through subsidizing less-permanent spaces for developing work.

The hope is to reallocate funds that have heretofore been solely earmarked for the construction and renovation of permanent arts facilities to different, alternative forms of space provision for artists. This is a major paradigm shift for government funding which has historically valued permanence and stability over impermanence and risk.

The existing funding model for cultural spaces has led to a major schism in the arts community; with 1% of arts institutions with permanent spaces accessing the majority of federal and provincial arts funding, and 99% of artists/arts organizations facing inadequate access to arts funding and space.

Why Not Theatre (along with many others) have managed to make in-roads at The Department of Canadian Heritage, which has made amendments to its Cultural Spaces Program, based in part on Why Not's recommendations. However, more needs to be done to embrace new models for funding cultural spaces for artists beyond the traditional approach of supporting permanent builds or spaces with long-term leases.

Recently, Why Not Theatre signed a short-term lease with Choice Properties on a 5,000 square foot meanwhile space on Dufferin Street. Working with a partner company Anandam Dance, the site has been accessed primarily by the local dance community, but

has also welcomed visual artists, musicians, and theatre makers to help support their work. We hope this type of opportunity expands and continues for artists in the city and we are grateful to Choice Properties for opening its doors, especially as we wrapped up our Space Project.

“I cannot even begin to explain the precariousness of the dance sector in Toronto. It was shaky before the pandemic, but its decline has accelerated in its wake. One of the massive blocks is a lack of access to affordable, adaptable space. This opportunity is a game-changer and a lifeline for dance in this city. The space is fully booked with a range of activities, including community classes, rehearsals for touring work, and works-in-progress, catering to multiple generations and dance forms.”

– BRANDY LEARY, CHOREOGRAPHER

Ultimately, by completing this project, Why Not hopes to put more funds into the hands of independent artists, leverage cross-sectorial partnerships to activate underutilized spaces in urban centres, increase the number of arts development spaces in cities across the country, shift the paradigm from permanent to temporary space for artists, and enable government funders to better support independent artists and arts organizations in impactful ways.

To put it plainly, with the help of many artists, collaborators, and funders, we showed you what is possible. Now it is on those who can support to create opportunities for artists to build on our findings, in the hopes that we can find a way to add some relief to the artist's pocket. This way, we invest in artists, in arts and culture, and we prove that we believe that artists matter.

APPENDIX

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

What Artists Reported as Cost Savings

Artists consistently described the free access to creative space as a major financial relief — one that allowed them to redirect funds, reduce stress, and focus on their practice without compromise.

While the specific savings varied widely depending on the artist's medium, project duration, and local rental costs, the collective impact was significant:

- Hourly savings ranged from \$25–\$100 per hour
- Monthly savings spanned from \$200 to over \$1,500
- Project-based savings often totalled \$1,000 to \$5,000 — and in some cases, up to \$12,000
- One artist estimated their overall savings at \$10,000–\$40,000 annually, when factoring in rental, equipment, and rehearsal-related costs
- Several noted that they would not have pursued their projects at all had space not been freely provided

How has gaining access to space impacted the Artists' work?

~90% Reduced financial stress
Selected by the largest number of respondents (approx. 90%)

~60% Allowed me to take more creative risks
Selected by approx. 60%

~60% Enabled me to deepen my practice without the pressure of immediate delivery
Selected by approx. 60%

~60% Increased the number of performances I've developed
Selected by approx. 35%

0% Had no significant impact on my work
Selected by none

The Artists: Practice and Positionality

00 Introduction

01 Executive Summary

02 Partners in Research

03 Space Partner Profiles

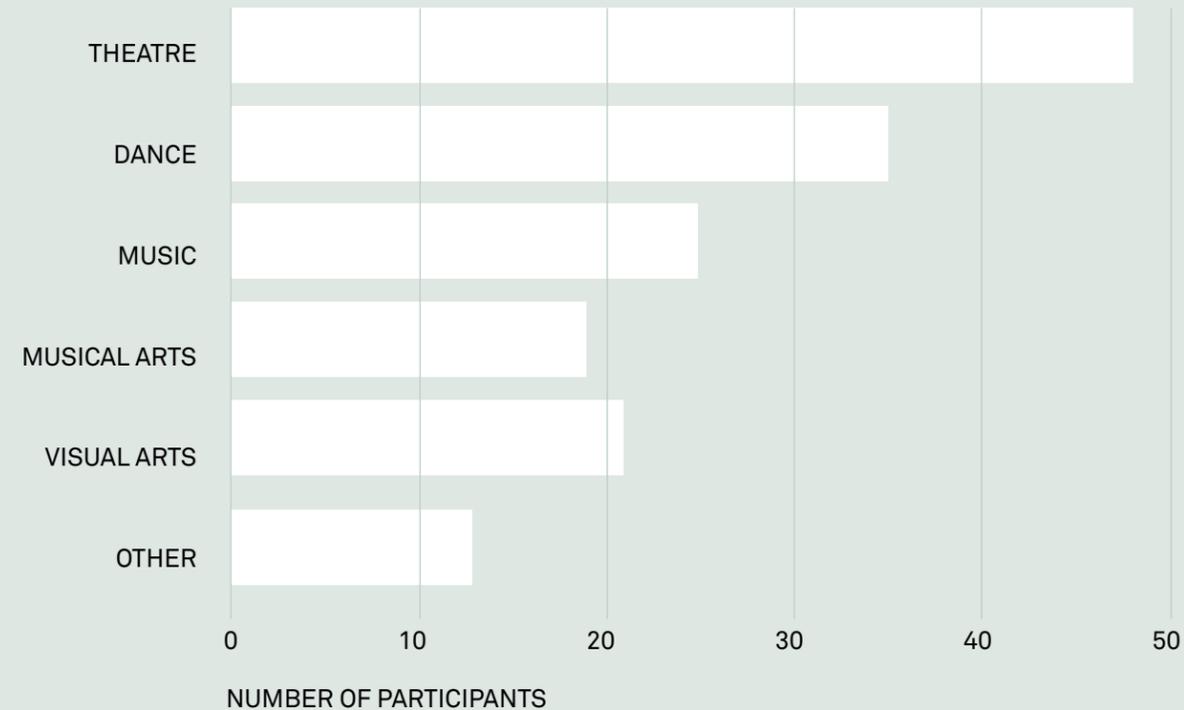
04 Artists: What We Heard

05 Beyond Space

06 Future Pathways

07 Appendix

Practice



Positionality

Artists identified across multiple axes, including race, gender, sexuality, ability, age, and class. Many named their social values explicitly, with a focus on anti-racism, queer visibility, community building, and supporting underrepresented voices.

**Note: Many artists reported working across multiple disciplines.*



massculture.ca/



whynot.theatre

The



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada

**METCALF
FOUNDATION**