

Surveying the Landscape: The New Play Ecology in Canada

Research Compiled & Reported by Louise Casemore for Alberta Playwrights Network



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des arts
du Canada



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treaty acknowledgement

It is impossible to separate the landscape from the land, and more importantly, the land from its people.

This research was largely conducted in the rightful home and territory of the people of the Treaty 7 region, which includes the Blackfoot Confederacy (made up of the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai First Nations), as well as the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First nations). The City of Calgary, or Moh'kins'tsis, is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III. It is on their land that we are asking these questions, and from their history that we derive much storytelling and knowledge.

As this work encompasses voices and experiences from across the northern expanse of Turtle Island; a space which encompasses the lands of Indigenous treaty territories as well as unceded lands that have been unjustly occupied - it is critical to recognize Indigenous peoples as the past, present and future caretakers of these lands. As the scars of colonization are continuous and present, I've spent much time during this research process considering the spaces both underfoot and between us, and recognize with gratitude the rightful keepers of this land as we continue the necessary dismantling of systems which oppress them.

We are all treaty people.

introduction

A landscape is composed of all the natural elements
which make up an environment -

the air,

the water,

the surface,

and the fiery chaos that swells underneath.

Similarly, the process of creating a new play requires a likewise collaboration
between elements of creativity, resources, support, and opportunity.

Both are forged and continuously evolving as a result of interaction and
opposition with the factors that shape them, requiring tremendous amounts
of effort and patience in order to move forward.

In relation to this study, the connection between play development and landscape refers
both to the varied methodologies inside of creating new plays and also the expanse of
space, both physical and intangible, encompassing theatre-making in Canada.

The approach here is anecdotal and artist driven; documented and interpreted using
an alchemy of observation and curiosity. It's not intended to be absolute or final, as the
processes involved with developing new plays move quickly and with more fluidity than
one could grasp in a single composition. And while statistics-based research can provide
necessary insight when it comes to clinical data, this study is designed to highlight the
complexity of an industry on the cusp of change.

This format acknowledges multiple voices, and the lack of one clear outcome or solution
when it comes to responsible practices within new play development. Recognizing the
impact of geography, inequity, and individual need, this is an assembly of elements,
gathered from the source.

Following the example of watercolour on canvas illustrating the
space where the sky meets the earth, what is offered here
are some perspectives on what exists between
concept and completion with the creation of
new Canadian plays.



From Trevor Rueger,

APN Executive Director

When I began my tenure as Executive Director at Alberta Playwrights' Network in 2007, I was fortunate to have at my disposal "From Creation to Production" a comparative report on new play development models in Canada, the United States, and Great Britain. The report was researched and written by Martin Kinch and Ben Henderson and provided me with a framework for our first 5-year plan. In 2018, the APN board and myself were having conversations about how we might better serve our membership.

The idea was to come up with some revolutionary programming and the ideas began to flow like water. However, as each item was tabled, the first question was "Do we think there is a need for that?" It occurred to us that as an organization we might be working with old assumptions that were not necessarily reflective of the current landscape of new play development and programming.

With the support of the Canada Council, we were able to embark upon the research project and report that you are about to dive into. I want to give thanks to any and all folx who participated and shared their stories with us, but I want to give a huge thank you to Louise Casemore, our intrepid researcher and project lead.

We truly couldn't have done it without her.

Louise Casemore is an artist advocate, prairie nuisance, and Sterling Award winning playwright. Based in Treaty 7 Territory, she is Artistic Director of indie renegade Defiance Theatre, recipient of the ATP/Enbridge Playwright's Award, and featured artist in NYC's "Necessary Exposure: The Female Playwright Project". Original works include *OCD*, *Functional*, *GEMINI* (Chinook Series, High Performance Rodeo), and the cabaret exorcism that is *Undressed* with Alberta Theatre Projects. She remains active in the larger community by way of dramaturgy, policy writing, teaching, and research. Her primary research focus resides in immersive and experience based performance, HR mechanisms in the arts, and the processes and procedures related to feedback between artists and organizations.

about the author - *Louise Casemore*

about the collaborators

Julia Seymour – Translator

Julia is a franco-albertan theatre artist, educator, and surtitler. She has been learning and working in the field of theatre subtitling and translation since 2018. She translated, created and operated the live titling productions for Edmonton's l'Unithéâtre during the 2019/2020 season. She has also conducted research in developing a pedagogical approach to theatre surtitling. In 2021, she will begin a Masters in Comparative and International Education at Stockholm University.

Julia est artiste, éducatrice, et surtitreuse franco-albertaine. Elle a commencé à apprendre et à travailler dans le domaine du surtitrage et de la traduction en 2018. Depuis ce temps, elle a fait la traduction et la création des surtitres pour l'Unithéâtre à Edmonton pendant la saison 2019/2020. Elle a aussi fait de la recherche sur le développement d'une approche pédagogique pour enseigner le surtitrage. En 2021, elle commence des études supérieures à L'Université de Stockholm.

Bianca Guimarães De Manuel – Cover Artist

Bianca Guimarães de Manuel is in between Brazil and Canada. She is a Latinx interdisciplinary artist often thinking art in relationship to space, often letting the medium emerge as the process evolves. It can show up as costumes, scenography, performing, etc. Bianca is super excited to visualize this research through illustration!

Kelsi Kalmer – Graphic Designer

Kelsi Kalmer is an artist and performer from Calgary, Alberta, with a Bachelor of Arts Honours Degree from the University of Alberta in Drama and Art & Design. She has a love for art, and a passion for making that has led her down many different paths - and she uses that variety as fuel for everything she does.

contributors

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survey distribution partners

PGC
Saskatchewan Playwright Centre
Pat The Dog
Nightswimming
Playwright's Workshop Montreal
Playwrights' Atlantic Resource Centre
Playwright's Theatre Centre
Center Des Auteurs Dramatiques
Andrea Romaldi (National Theatre School)
Major Matt Mason Collective



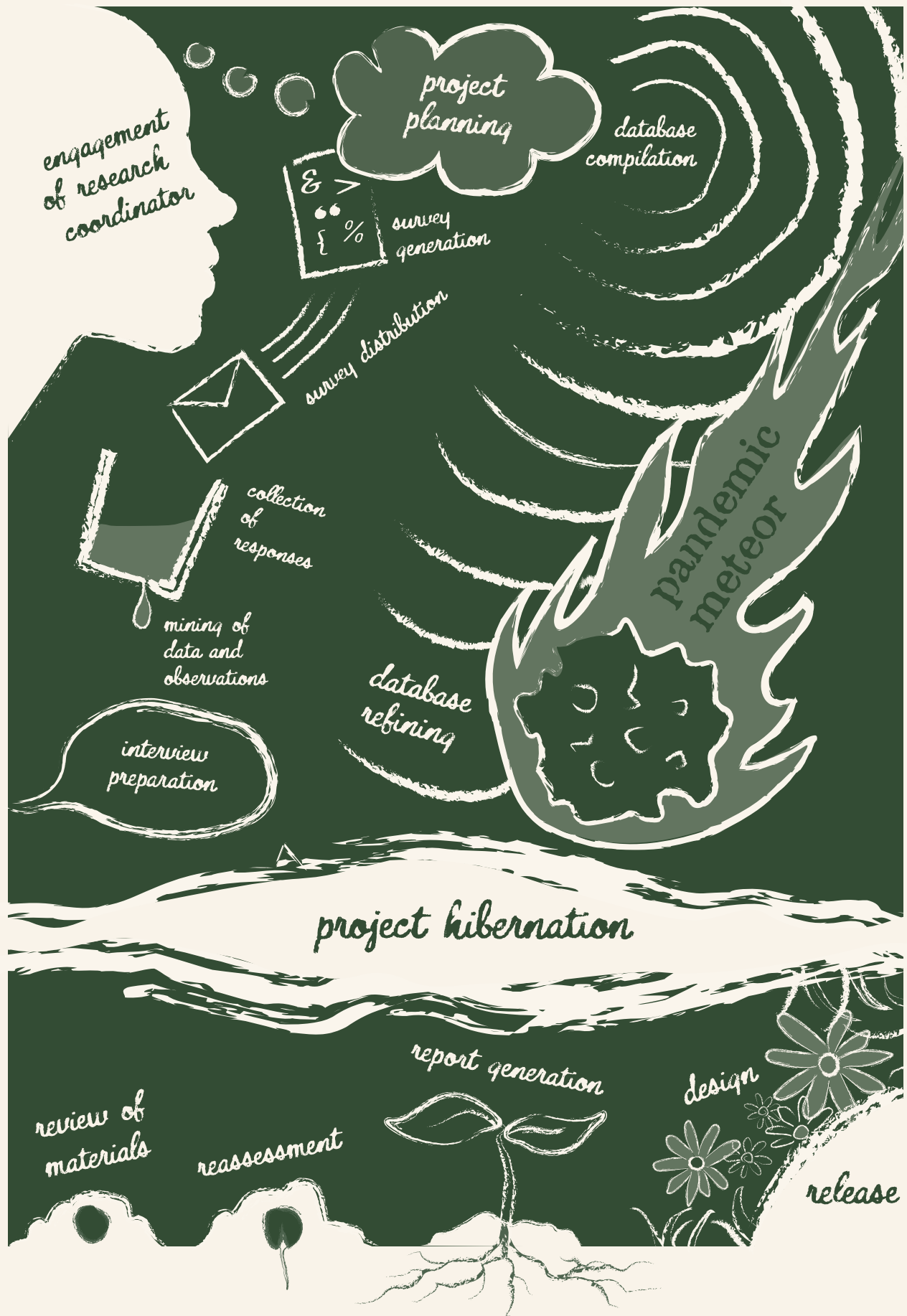
project overview

In May of 2019, Alberta Playwright's Network began a national research study with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts' Sector Innovation and Research grant, examining the status of new play development across Canada.

Intending to span a 12-month period, the study was focused on:

- “ gathering information directly from playwrights about their experiences with creating new work across the country
- % analysis of the resulting data and firsthand accounts to determine patterns and recurring themes
- > utilizing that information to drive a series of direct conversations with programmers, producers, funders, and play development centres about their engagement processes with playwrights
- { compilation of a practical resource database for playwrights; indicating programs, contacts, and opportunities for developing and distributing their work
- & reporting back to the community with research findings, survey data, and public release of the database

best laid plans.
in actuality, it unfolded like this...



impact of COVID-19

Darkness.

The sound of endless waves.

No landmarks for miles.

For hundreds of years, sailors on the open ocean used celestial navigation as the only method to determine where they were. Without technology to guide the way, they would calculate their position using the sun, the moon, and the stars. In time, these drawings and charts became the basis for mapping what was previously unknown, creating a record of how things looked at a specific moment in time.

In March of 2020 when the pandemic descended, we were on the precipice of shifting from processing the anonymous playwright surveys into one-on-one conversations with programmers, funders, presenters, and professional associations.

As shutdowns began and cancellations brought the entire performing arts industry to a halt, it became clear that our plans to sit down with decision makers were going to be included in those casualties. Even six-months, nine-months, a year later, the idea of phoning up arts leaders sequestered in their homes to discuss their organization's approach to new work seemed somewhat macabre. As organizations of all sizes scrambled to determine how to keep their staff employed and operations afloat, the prospect of proceeding with the research as planned was akin to inquiring about fire prevention techniques while someone is still actively choking on smoke.

So, alongside countless others in all areas of theatre practice, we adapted. Work on the study resumed in earnest in January of 2021, shifting our perspective from the landscape at our feet to a pre-pandemic map of the stars.

playwright survey

purpose

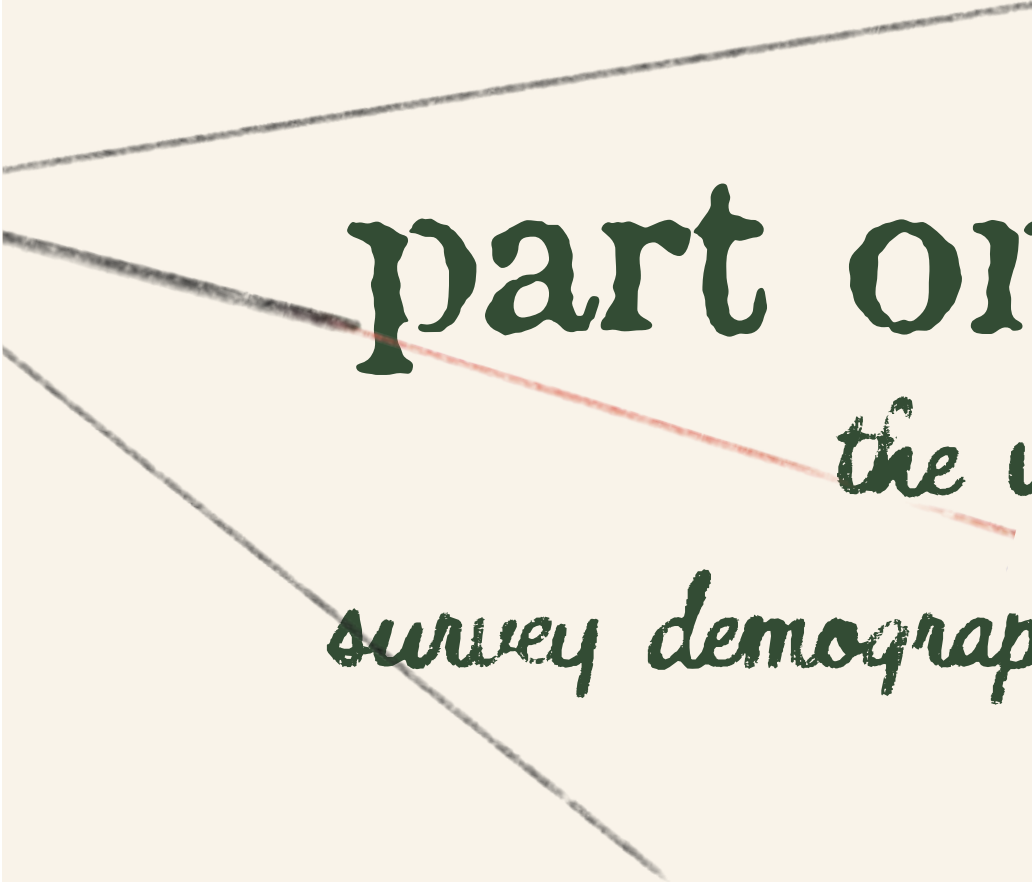
- * To directly connect with self-identified playwrights, gathering insights into their experiences with new play development.
- * To offer a platform for playwrights to share their feelings and thoughts on the sector as a whole.
- * To document recurring patterns and concerns for future conversations with leaders in the sector.
- * To assemble data on the process, experience, and demographic of playwrights in regions across Canada.

format

The priorities for the survey were ease, dissemination, and anonymity. It was open to any individual self-identifying as a playwright in Canada, with no qualifying criteria regarding age, experience, training, background, or membership. Participants accessed the survey through a one click URL link to a Google Forms page with no login or registration necessary. Consisting of 17 questions total with no mandatory options, each section included a mix of short answer, multiple choice, and longform written response. Based on a selection of test respondents in advance of the wide release, the average duration was reported as taking between approximately 13-17 minutes to complete. There were iterations of the survey available in English and French, with translation support for the French option provided by theatre artist and educator Julia Seymour.

approach

Respondents were invited to be candid, take their time, and return to the survey as many times as needed before submitting. No contact information was collected or assigned, and no requests were made for identifying details. Recognizing that the online/written format may not be inclusive for the needs and comfort of every individual, interested participants were provided with a toll-free phone number and email address to coordinate participation using other means. The survey was open for responses from September 16th to November 15th, 2021.

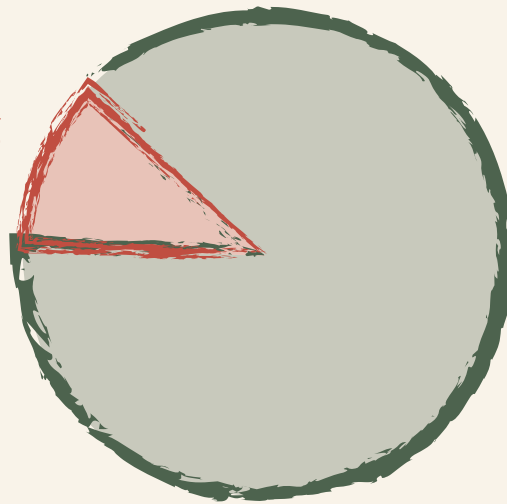


part one
the who:
survey demographics

total
survey
responses

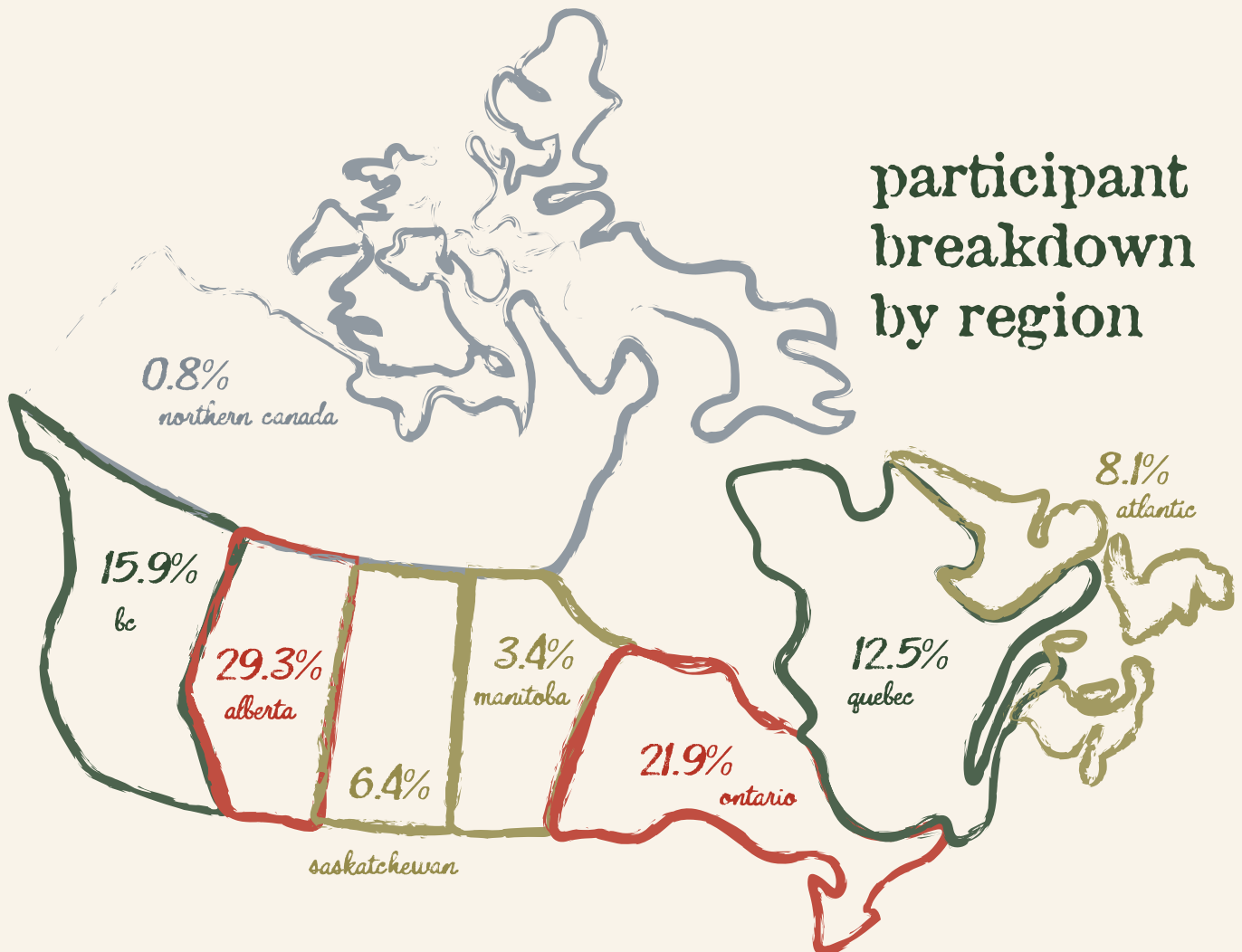
232

11.2%
french

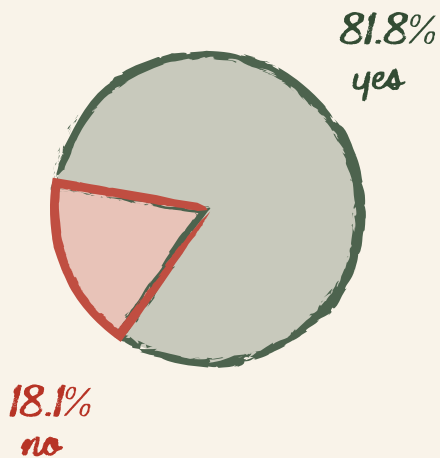


88.7%
english

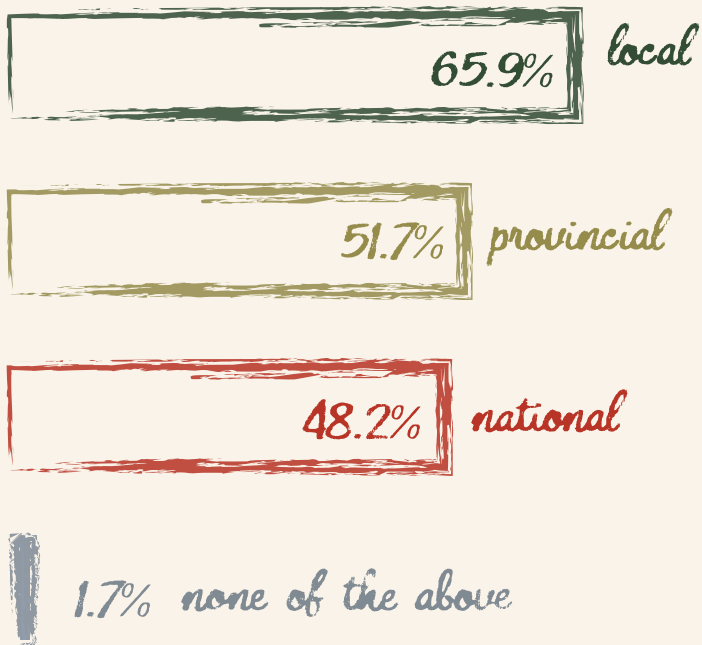
participant
breakdown
by region



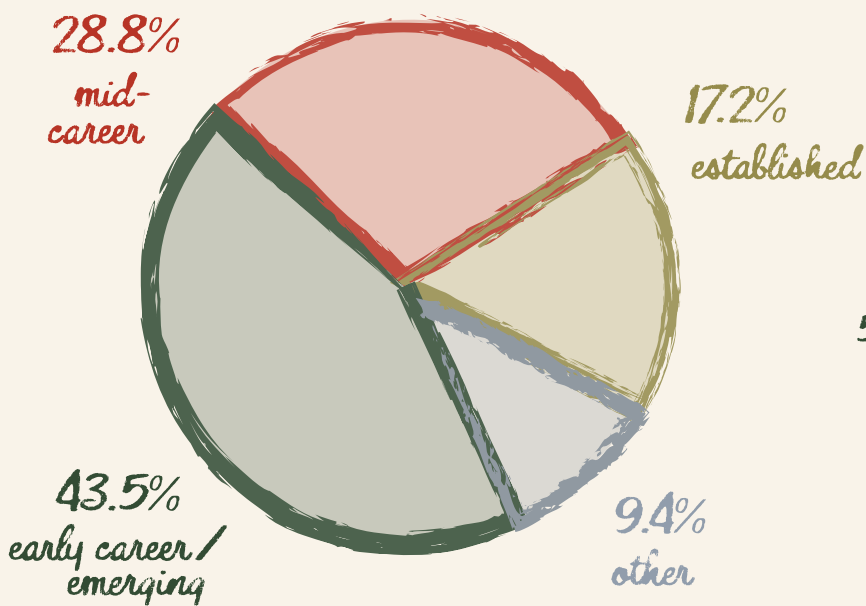
In your playwriting experience, has your work received a professional production? *



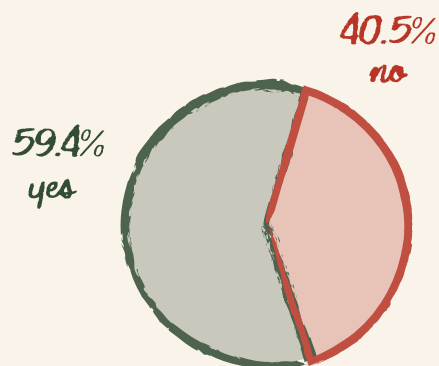
When you think about yourself as a playwright, do you consider your artistic community to be:
(Check all that apply.)



What stage do you identify with in terms of your playwriting experience?



In your playwriting experience, has your work received a professional commission? **



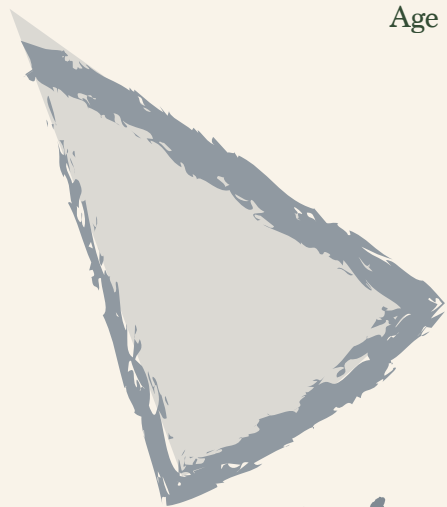
* "Production" defined here as any public presentation of work with paid attendance.

** "Commission" defined here as any payment received for the purposes of creating or developing a new play.


growing pains

For participants in the survey, the prospect of selecting a career stage was one of notable uncertainty. Understanding that the task of defining where one is in relation to artistic experience can be a complicated one due to many internal and external parameters, questions regarding respondent demographics were positioned at the end of the survey in an effort to avoid any sensation of “vetting”. Although respondents were given the option to choose a category according to their own criteria, select “Other” to indicate a wording of their choice, or skip the question entirely - there was a high level of commentary by way of explanation for the respondent’s choice for this question exclusively. The theme of age was prevalent inside of these anecdotal responses; with several playwrights feeling early in their practice but not young enough to be comfortably emerging, some in the mid-level category remarking with frustration they felt they should be further along in terms of accomplishments based on their age or years of experience, and a high percentage of those who selected “Established” offering the caveat that they had done so because they were simply “old”. This reluctance to self-identify can be attributed to a variety of sources, with major culprits in this case being the prevalent use of age as a qualifying factor for artistic training and development opportunities, and the shortage of programs intended to support artists who are mid-career and beyond.

Age limitations for training opportunities, awards, and mentorship are an area of frustration among the artists participating in this study, with many feeling unfairly categorized on a binary of either “on their way up” or “on their way out” - with no space in between. The responses indicate an opposition to the idea that many institutions and opportunity providers consider the “emerging” to primarily be artists under 30 who are fresh out of training programs. This bypasses the wide assortment of artists whose trajectory has not followed a linear schedule; including those who came into practice later in life (due to economic, family, or other circumstances), those transitioning to the sector from other industries or areas of practice, and artists who measure growth using a metric beyond the number of years spent in the industry.

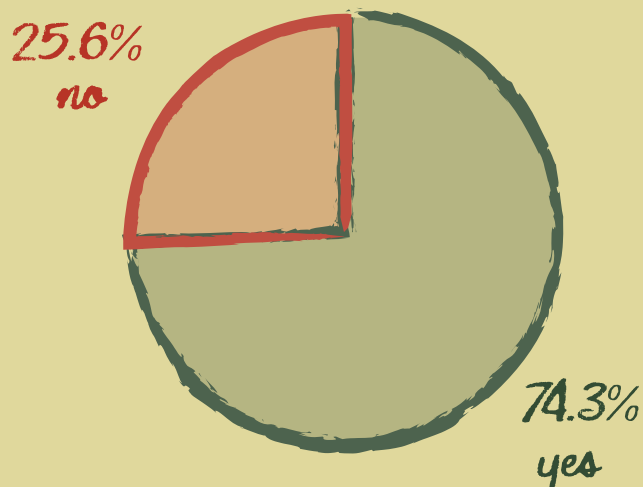


9.4%
other

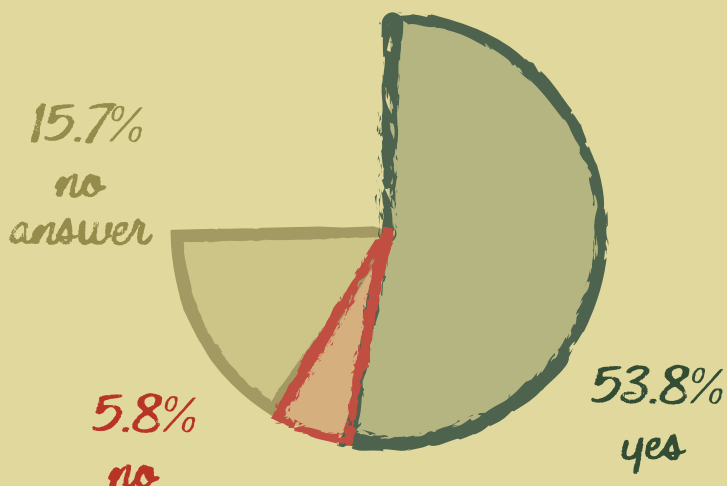


part two
the how:
process and resources

Are you a member of a playwriting guild or association? *



If you are part of a guild or association, has your membership been beneficial? Why or why not?



written examples of why membership has been helpful:

"I find the access to standardized contracts and rates beneficial. I also like to support an organization that advocates and negotiates on behalf of playwrights."

"Otherwise I would not know about opportunities for submissions."

"Providing advice and resources, and RRSP contributions."

"They allowed me to network with professionals across the country, promoted my work, made me aware of the work of others, contracted amateur productions of my plays, provided educational opportunities, made me feel a part of a community."

written examples of why membership has *not* been helpful:

"Not super beneficial perhaps because it is unclear what they can help with."

"History of exclusion and tokenism in my experience."

"Membership fees are hard to maintain/justify."

*Note: this survey was distributed by the Playwright's Guild of Canada and other playwright associations to their membership

Breaking down your playwright experience into percentages, how much of your time is spent on:

creation

(writing/researching/developing)

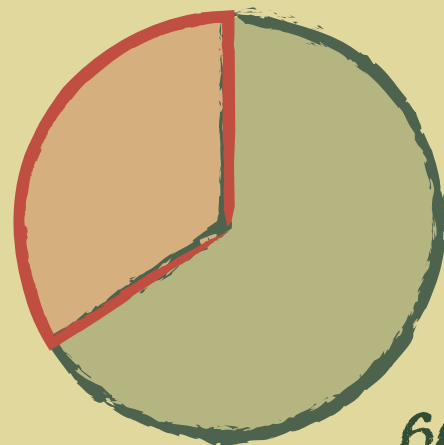
and how much is spent on

business

(submitting/applying/sourcing opportunities or partners)?

total summary

34%
business

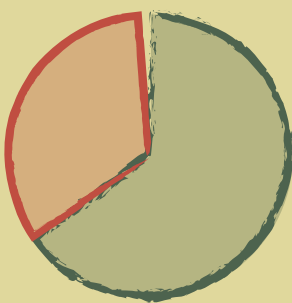


66%
creative

breakdown by career stage

34%
business

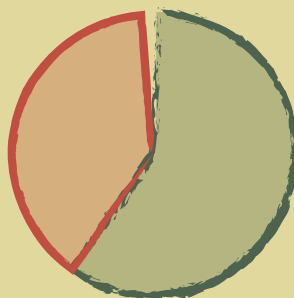
65%
creative



early/emerging

39%
business

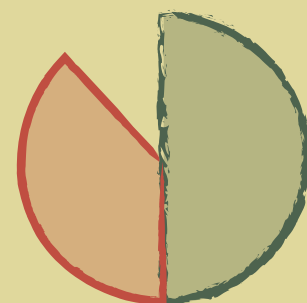
60%
creative



mid-career

38%
business

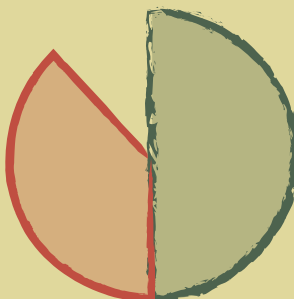
50%
creative



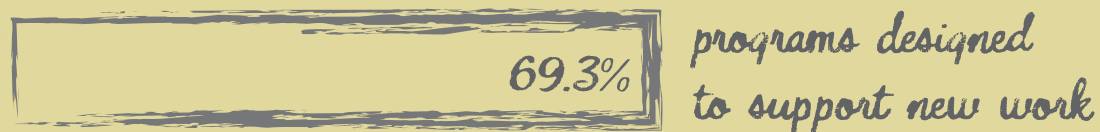
established

balancing act

In each category of experience there was a noticeable trend of very high and very low percentages creating a moderate overall average. Recurring comments from those self-identified as “emerging” attributed a high creative percentage to having an abundance of this available time because they aren’t “professional” yet, indicating they don’t have business needs or opportunities to allocate their time to. Yet, within the same group there is also indication of the exact opposite - having high percentages of time spent on business with little on creation because their time is consumed by efforts to “break into” the industry. Within the respondents who self-identified as “established”, although there were a noticeable amount of playwrights who referenced higher creative time as a result of utilizing an agent to manage business affairs, this group reported the lowest percentages of time spent creatively, attributed to the widespread sentiment of being swallowed by the workload of maintaining business and professional opportunities.



What resources have you pursued or applied for in the development of your work or practice?
(Choose all that apply)



most common written examples:

- 1 financial support from family/loved ones
- 2 commissions
- 3 crowdfunding/public donations

for resources left unchecked, what has prevented you from pursuing or applying for them?

Examples from Emerging Artists:

“A lack of time and energy/burn out.”

“I am unfamiliar with any local mentorship opportunities.”

“I have never had success with a grant and it often seems like wasted effort.”

“Playwright's units and development centres remain somewhat exclusive.”

“Feeling like I don't qualify as a 'professional' / not understanding the specifics required for an application.”

Examples from Mid-Career Artists:

“There seem to be a lot of opportunities for emerging playwrights and not a ton for mid career playwrights.”

“Having a family to support.”

“Low return on investment (work to apply, unpredictable outcome).”

“There are very few new work programs that support musical theatre in Canada.”

“I don't feel much connection or interaction with other theatre creators, outside of the region that I live in.”

Examples from Established Artists:

“Leaving my smaller city for mentorship in a larger city is cost prohibitive. Often these programs do not have money for travel or for living expenses while the playwright is there.”

“Sometimes there's an age limit or a specific theme that doesn't apply to me or my work.”

“Applying for a grant has taken me as long as writing a draft of a full length play.”

“Mentorships or going to Banff (for example) would be a treat but it would also be time without an income or perhaps more accurately, the hope of an income.”

“My mentors who have helped shape me as a writer, who keep checking in on me and continue to ask for updates on my work.”

“Financially, any other jobs I can scrape up.”

“Inner fire that won’t quit. even when i wish it would.”

“What sustains me are the organisations that work hard for their writers.”

“The joy of creating/catharsis of writing.”

“Teaching.”

**in your own words,
what sustains you as a
playwright?**

“I'm inspired by my colleagues and fellow writers.”

“Community. queer voices in the room/ onstage/in the audience.”

“At the moment, I think the only thing sustaining me is that I don't have a plan b, and don't know what I'd do if I switched tracks.”

“Feedback and the response from the audience.”

“My full time day job.”

relationship status: it's complicated

There is an intentional ambiguity within the survey question
“what sustains you?”,
and the resulting responses reflect this space for interpretation.

Designed to gauge the immediate impressions from playwrights on what factors enable them to continue creating within the Canadian theatre ecology, the answers offer a strong mix of practical supports (often monetary) and less tangible, emotional sources. Across the board, answers referring to financial means of sustainability were largely attributed to employment outside of playwriting and the arts entirely, conjuring Robert Anderson’s 1966 lament that one can “make a killing, but not a living” in the theatre. Meanwhile, inside the replies which reflect the more spiritual or sentimental interpretation of the question, there are two prevailing sub-genres: playwrights who are buoyed by aspects of the creative process, and those who seem to continue inside the industry at their peril (or at the very least, against their own better judgement). This scenario paints a picture of artists with a “full cup” relationship to their practice (pushing through the difficulty of creation for the payoff of a favorable response), sitting alongside those who exist in a “cup empty” perspective (disenfranchised by the sensation of all give with little return). And while those two outlooks may exist simultaneously within one playwright or shift intermittently from one to the other, there does exist one area of unity - with the majority of respondents demonstrating a clear passion for storytelling and overall belief in the art form, the desire for more reliable and substantial methods of compensation is something all playwrights surveyed can agree on.



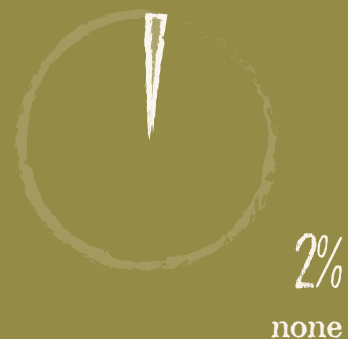
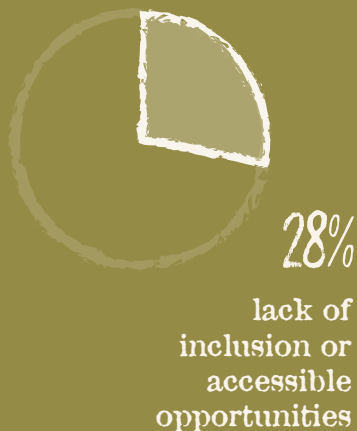
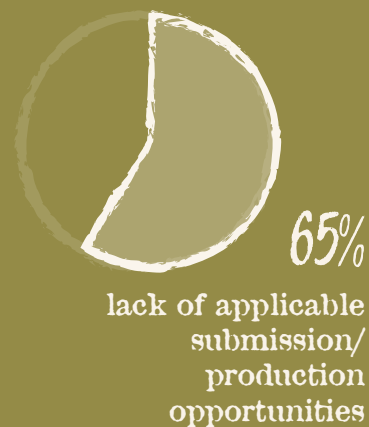
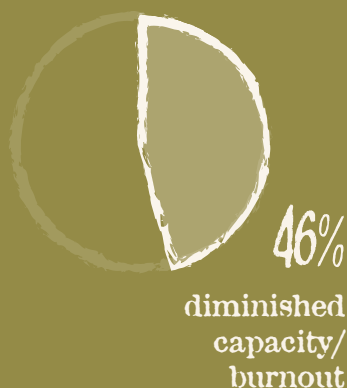
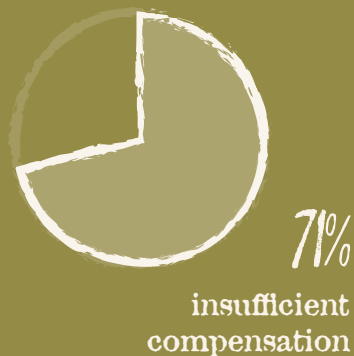
part three

the what:

first-hand accounts

What challenges or barriers do you experience as a playwright creating new work?

(Choose all that apply)



recurring challenges and barriers by region



british columbia

“I’ve observed that there are fewer and fewer opportunities for playwrights to submit their material for consideration. A complete lack of literary/new play departments in existing theaters makes it difficult or impossible for playwrights to submit.”

“Text based work is only presented by the big theatres and they have specific mandates based on audience demographics.”

“I find it hard to break into the theatre scene in my local community in Vancouver. It seems like there are only opportunities for emerging or new artists trying to hone their craft.”

“Being located away from a major theatre center.”

“I have found it very difficult to get AD’s to read my work, even if I know them. They often acknowledge the submission and then never respond.”

silent treatment

“they often acknowledge the submission and then never respond”

From all regions, one of the most prolific areas of dismay among participating playwrights is the frequency with which they are submitting scripts, expressions of interest, and lines of communication to producing organizations and receiving nothing in reply. For many years and until fairly recently, many theatres employed the unspoken “slush pile” system to deal with scripts that were mailed in throughout the year; bestowing a lucky intern, dramaturg, or Artistic Associate with the task of sorting, reading, and often times recommending scripts they think the Artistic Director should consider. And while this era had the unfortunate byproduct of playwrights incurring the financial expense of regular printing and postage related to sending off their scripts, within the current climate things are getting lost in a different kind of abyss. While on one hand it would seem that the practice of submitting digital copies of scripts would be more direct and less costly to the artists, the absence of a hard copy document makes it easier for organizations to dismiss or accidentally ignore. No body no crime, so to speak. And from the perspective of organizations there are dilemmas in the current scenario as well, as with the ease of access brought on by publicly available contact information there is an exponential increase in inquiries. One company contacted in relation to this study offered that there are times when the Artistic Director receives upwards of 200 unsolicited scripts a month, many of which are outside the scope or relevance to their organization. Even when scripts are applicable to a company’s producing interests, it’s largely unfeasible for most theatres to allocate the resources required to employ dedicated personnel to manage playwright inquiries, read scripts, document feedback, and offer a reply. So while the sector transitions from the bygone days of writers dropping a play in the post with a hope that someone sees its potential on the other side, the current scenario creates disillusionment among artists left to wonder if their time and energy are being wasted. And while persevering through rejection is a known and accepted part of the process for many playwrights attempting to connect their work with the world, the acute sensation of invisibility brought on by a lack of communication regarding submissions risks the sector losing great artists for good.



quebec

“Being anglophone in Montreal, opportunities are very limited, and the few we have are often taken up with Toronto-centric artists, but it doesn’t work both ways: how can we develop a strong local voice with no middle ground—it’s either Fringe or Stratford.”

“Fewer alternatives in Quebec and Canada to earn an income through means other than royalties (such as cultural mediation, writing workshops, jury/peer-review committees etc.) compared to France for example.”

“Give me TIME!!!! Producers should learn that everybody wins when the creators find the necessary rhythm in order to achieve a project... in the hope of achieving an end result that has fully realized its potential.”



northern canada

“Living in a small market, there are few opportunities for production, facilities for staging a production, and opportunities for marketing.”



atlantic region

“It’s difficult to start out on one’s own (writing your first grant, for example). Personal connections with more established artists has sometimes been helpful, but more often been discouraging.”

“Producing companies can barely afford minimal, if any compensation, and rarely – if ever! – commission work. The playwright must be their own, self-producing agent.”

“You have to be a playwright with produced works before you can participate in opportunities: writers colonies, workshops - otherwise you’re considered a lightweight with not much to contribute.”

“There aren’t many play commissions in the east coast, very few companies commission new plays and when they do they usually go with established playwrights.”

*“the playwright must be their own,
self-producing agent”*

“getting
productions
outside
of my
province is
always a
challenge”



saskatchewan

“Artistic directors and/or theatre companies don't read scripts - it mostly comes down to that.”

“I live in Saskatchewan and so the professional theatre markets are quite limited. Getting productions outside of my province is always a challenge and has always been. More than anything it leaves me in a position where I simply have neither the energy nor the connections to pursue relationships with theatres outside of my region.”

“There are still so few theatres producing much work by women, or much new work. In this region, there are very few opportunities to move up from development to stage, or to step up from one stage size to another.”

“Geographical and cultural isolation (being a linguistic minority) involves travel costs, a lack of opportunities, and a small local arts community.”



manitoba

“Manitoba probably has ten times more playwrights creating professional calibre work than there are opportunities in a year.”

“Many playwrights are vying for theatres' attention — theatres open to taking a risk on new plays quite often have a regional mandate — personal contact seems to play a significant role in whether a new play is considered.”



ontario

“I think that many theatres are very closed to reading new work. I think women are under represented and I also think there is a kind of ageism - even though the majority of theatre goers are in the older demographic.”

“Grant structure in Ontario is very restrictive. You have to be an established professional or a non profit to qualify for government support. There's very little support for new writers from corporate sponsors, and what there is in the way of grants to emerging writers is typically restricted to young people.”

“The time and the money it takes to make art in a city as expensive as Toronto is a huge drain on my creative abilities and means that I work 50-60 hour weeks every week on average.”

“Many submission calls are incredibly specific. So specific, that I'm better off writing a play based on the guidelines, rather than write something on my own volition. That is not a submission call: that is a contest.”

“As a regional artist, I lack some of the resources available in larger centers, such as playwright units, festivals, and professional development.”

“I never submit if there's a submission/reading fee. Canada seems hell bent on producing the same 8 playwrights, over and over. I have had more plays produced in the States.”

location location location

This remark highlights another noticeable trend inside responses from all regions: playwrights feeling adrift outside of the major city centres. While there are references to the high cost of living and saturation of artists inside larger cities such as Vancouver or Toronto, there are many who express feelings of isolation, invisibility, and a significant lack of opportunities being based outside of areas of high population. Considering the expansive size of Canada, there are a tremendous amount of playwrights located in rural and remote settings, prairie and Atlantic provinces, northern territories, and areas outside of an urban hub - so the widespread sensation that where these places are is where opportunities are not,

“i live in northern ontario, outside the GTA, which is a major barrier”

is troubling. On the positive, it does emphasize the critical need and positive impact of play development centers as a regional support for artists outside of larger centres. Noted particularly within the survey responses in the Atlantic region, there is an outpouring of gratitude for agencies offering not only programs for play development but much needed networking outlets for artists in the region to connect.



alberta

“I have a full time job and playwriting is done off the side of my desk. It places me at a catch 22. On the one hand, I am able to live because I do not rely on playwriting... but this slows my growth and puts me at a disadvantage when competing with other playwrights for awards and jobs.”

“Since moving to Alberta I’ve struggled to connect with any local artists.”

“It is rare I am paid to create a new work - the research, writing, and dramaturgy more often than not comes at my own expense.”

“You can write a great play, but companies are producing new work by known names.”

“There seems to be a bias against musical theatre and many companies seem uninterested in musical theatre writers from outside of Toronto.”

“I don't see a lot of opportunities for playwrights here but I also am distrustful of a lot of the institutional approaches to developing new plays. i.e. I am sick of workshops and public readings being seen as 'opportunities'.”

developmental abyss

Playwright likes theatre company.

Theatre company is interested in play.

“
... i am
interested in
opportunities
to have
my play
DONE”

Then, often through a Playwright’s Unit, commission, or development program, the playwright is offered support by the company through the writing process in an arrangement that culminates in a reading or workshop.

Tale as old as time.

What follows, however, is a recurring sense of disappointment for playwrights with what comes next. Acknowledging that play workshops and staged readings are a highly utilized method for play development, there are regular sentiments from playwrights about feeling abandoned or in limbo afterwards. Investing the time and energy required to develop a play with an organization, but then exiting the reading or workshop with no sense about the company’s continued interest in the work. It’s the creative equivalent to someone saying “I’ll call you” and the end of a first or second date. On the other hand, development activity that isn’t working toward the larger goal of production is, for some playwrights, the ideal scenario - allowing the play the freedom to find it’s way forward without the pressure of producibility or suitability to that specific organization. But the use of open ended development processes comes with a degree of risk. Plays without plans to move forward into production are susceptible to becoming stuck in development limbo, with organizations opting to offer smaller development measures to a higher volume of artists and forgoing the meaningful investment of nourishing a play beyond actors reading a first draft from music stands. While these approaches can be very helpful at certain stages of exploration, there is a middle stage to development that is often bypassed and highly necessary, allowing playwrights to integrate the findings from those readings and workshops into the important next stages on the path from page to stage. The danger is that these development models can ultimately feel like an empty gesture that playwrights are expected to keep themselves warm with, since working with a company who has no intention of further commitment can be a demoralizing dead end if expectations and interests are not clear.

recurring challenges and barriers by career stage

early career/emerging

“Almost all opportunities for emerging playwrights are restricted to one act or “straightforward” work, usually not many opportunities for more abstract, immersive (or more ambitious) work.”

“As an emerging artist, I have found plenty of opportunities for brand-new works to be presented under the banner of new/emerging work - but even when those productions receive critical praise and fill houses, there seems to be little opportunity or guidance for next steps or second productions.”

“I don't really feel a part of the theatre community. I still feel very much like an outsider.”

“How/where/what to apply for in terms of funding. There isn't a standard approach to access funds in the creation phase.”

“I don't know much about the business side of things and often feel like I'm just 'taking a shot' when it comes to applications.”

“There are many opportunities I feel my work would flourish at, but reading fees only allow for artists with financial advantage to thrive. The application processes are also so dense and often ask for more than a script. It takes longer to submit a play than it does to apply for a job.”

“Joining the party is difficult. It feels like if one is not already friends with theatre people one's work is simply disregarded. How does one become friends with theatre people without having gone through a writing or degree program?”

“The university environment is where many people get their start in theatre, but as an individual with a learning disability, I have found the structure of the university system to be a barrier for most of the career paths I have tried.”

“joining the party is difficult”

mid-career

“It can be lonely work.”

“The worst feeling is seeing a play go up in front of an audience when it's not ready. This seems to happen frequently. I think it's because theatres who focus on new play development often program a playwright's idea for production, rather than programming a play that is closer to being ready. This pressure sets a play up for failure.”

“Being assigned a dramaturg. Some companies have resident dramaturgs or the director takes on the role of dramaturg. This can be problematic.”

“Burnout and the requirement to make money to survive has prevented me from upholding a steady creative practice.”

“It just ultimately takes so much time and then it feels like you win the lottery if there is interest in a production.”

“Often I feel like my thematic concerns and my aesthetic as a playwright are out of step with the times.”

“It's hard to get producers to believe in your work on paper, they seem to need to see it in person.”

*“it feels like you win the lottery
if there is interest in a production”*

established

“With not a lot of producing companies in Canada it is very hard to get work outside the region where one lives and works.”

“I’ve observed that there are fewer and fewer opportunities for playwrights to submit their material for consideration. A complete lack of literary/new play departments in existing theaters makes it difficult or not impossible for playwrights to submit and for theaters to have the resources to respond.”

“The money’s shitty. I mean really that’s it right? So one has to do more than makes sense in order to make enough to live on.”

“Although many professionals in my area have agreed I am an excellent writer, this has never resulted in PACT productions or invitations to public opportunities.”

“I write constantly but I cannot compete with younger playwrights who are comfortable with social media.”

“Lack of productions beyond one or two means there is so little opportunity for a script to make money.”

*“lack of productions beyond one or two
means there is so little opportunity
for a script to make money”*

purity ball

Among the playwright responses, there is frustration at all levels regarding the emphasis on initial play development and premiere productions. This sentiment is seconded by a noticeable lack of support overall from funders and programmers for second or subsequent productions. This focus on the first run as the highest point of achievement presents a major dropoff in the lifespan of many Canadian plays, with new plays experiencing a triumphant rise toward the stage and then a steep descent to the shelf as they are shopped around for infinity as a less desirable property. The preoccupation with premieres is one that is also rooted in the deeper colonial habits of play development within the sector, with organizations taking great pride in being part of the ground-floor of new material, cherishing the “discovery” of new artists and new plays, and equating being the first to offer audiences a particular work as something of higher value or excitement. The residue of this permeates into the development of new work as well, with some Artistic Directors being less inclined to take on plays that have received previous support from other organizations, on the basis that they wish to be part of the artistic process from start to finish or the unspoken opinion that the influence of outside forces is somehow negative or diminishing to a play’s appeal or value. For plays which have received a premiere, this attitude creates the unfortunate equation of:

*development + premiere + time =
extinction*

This, in addition to being artistically demoralizing, is a particularly wasteful fate for plays which have been nourished (and even successful!) in other cities. Considering the formidable size of the national market and the multitudes of theatres committed to presenting Canadian work, it’s an unfortunate outcome to see production ready plays forced into early retirement because of a larger cultural emphasis on favoring that which is “new”. With viable and contemporary plays experiencing a triumphant rise toward the stage and then a steep descent to the shelf, there is a silo-ing effect created around first productions that is counterintuitive both artistically and economically. By underestimating the benefit of a first production on the playwright’s ability to refine the script, the survey responses highlight a missed opportunity for some plays to reach their full potential. And while enthusiasm for initial development and premieres helps in time to steer audiences toward new voices and important new stories, there is an immediate need present for the sector to also showcase the countless well-tested horses out there just waiting for another chance to run.

Can you describe an experience with developing or creating new work that was negative?

“Despite advertisements and personal invitations, no industry leaders attended the reading.”

“I’ve learned the hard way not to feel obligated to change anything I don’t want to.”

“By the time opening happened no one felt the play was ready.”

“Criticism more than encouragement paralyzed me.”

“I reached out to an established artist for advice on grant writing, to which they said “don’t bother.”

“Companies that have writers spend time and energy as part of a Unit without ever having the plan to produce their work.”

“Feeling a total lack of opportunity to take my work further after a staged reading or even a first draft.”

“As the bible says ‘no-one is a prophet in his own home town’.”

“I’ve had feedback from an established dramaturg that really came across as “this is how I would write it’.”

“Tokenism, little room made for inclusivity.”

“Promised productions, verbal without contracts, that were ‘dumped’.”

“Being stuck in a cookie-cutter development process.”

“I did a workshop with a company and it assumed that my work belonged to them.”

“Any number of the theatrical experiences where my gender, sexual orientation, and disability was not only not accommodated, but rejected.”

the view from outside

“my gender,
sexual
orientation,
and disability
was not
only not
accommodated,
but rejected”

Within the playwright surveys, there are multiple references to racism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and ageism. Offered from playwrights in all areas of experience and geographical region, the accounts include incidents of systemic exclusion, exploitation, and discrimination which can not be downplayed, argued, or ignored. With experiences spanning tokenization in public-facing marketing or programming, development opportunities with no intention of production as performative lip service, examples of insensitivity and othering inside of creative processes, and the presence of hostility when it comes to speaking up about concerns - there are no corners of the playwright experience escaping untouched by the effects of inequity. Extending also into areas of language, there are anecdotes depicting a difficult disparity between english and french speaking artists in various regions. With english artists in Quebec communicating the feeling of being isolated or unwelcome, and french-speaking playwrights living outside of Quebec feeling largely adrift and unsupported. It's necessary to acknowledge as well the overwhelming whiteness of the majority of playwright-focused guilds and associations across the country, and the subsequent trickle-down effect that has on who comprises the membership of those organizations. With the impact of exclusion, colonialism, and white supremacy causing tremendous damage to playwrights and theatre artists over a prolonged period of history, it's easy to draw a line between a lack of meaningful change and a resulting sense of defeat and disinterest from those who have repeatedly tried to gain access. Although there have been efforts in recent years to address the lack of diversity within the Canadian theatre ecology, those who have been unable to receive the same

support, understanding, and opportunity of their white, straight, or able bodied colleagues will naturally feel less inclined to return to areas that have been inhospitable or harmful. So while the sector attempts to forge new paths toward diversity, equity, and inclusion, the responses gathered inside this study indicate clearly that work must also be done to address those who have previously attempted to access these spaces only to be dismissed or exploited. Rebuilding theatrical spaces in order to welcome the next generation of artists is important, but the surveys here remind the sector to also consider - what is being offered for those who have *already* been mistreated to inspire them to walk through the door again?

Can you describe an experience with developing or creating new work that was negative? *Continued...*

“Developing work for a commission, then never being told the producer was not interested in the work.”

“Living and working in a small regional environment is disastrously isolating.”

“One long series of staged readings with nothing moving toward production.”

“Being the lowest paid artist involved in my premiere.”

“Directors thinking they know how to develop new work but don't know how to protect the writing process.”

“It's hard to get in the door sometimes when you're writing stories from another culture that people in power here don't recognize.”

“With a promised production, I didn't want to jeopardize my relationship with the theatre by speaking up about not getting paid for the workshop.”

it's an honour just to be here

“with a promised production, i didn't want to jeopardize my relationship with the theatre by speaking up about not getting paid”

A troubling commonality within the playwright surveys is the experience of writers being unpaid or comparatively underpaid inside the development leading up to the premiere of a play. While conversations surrounding fee structures for commissions are more common and ongoing, this study yielded multiple accounts from playwrights bringing to light a habit of exclusion when it comes to compensation during the rehearsal process.

Artists from an array of experience levels outlined similar scenarios - being present in the rehearsal hall, observing the working process in association with a creative team, compiling re-writes or adjustments as discoveries are made, and doing so with full knowledge that they are the only ones in the room not being paid. Falling outside of the regular contracting parameters stipulated by associations such as the Canadian Actors' Equity and the Associated Designers of Canada, playwrights experience a problematic inequity inside of production contracting and ultimately the larger belief system surrounding who is most benefited inside of the production of a new play. Stories that detail the resentments and mixed feelings in the weeks leading to opening night critically confront the areas of assumption that a playwright should ultimately just feel fortunate to have their play done, as though they are the sole entity deriving benefit from the production. This highlights the precarious ambiguity surrounding the compensation that is allocated to script development and draft writing, which needs to take into account the role of the playwright inside the rehearsal process as well. These incidents may be shrugged off by the notion that the playwright has already been paid for their overall work (in the case of many commission arrangements, which do not account for work beyond the generation of script drafts) or the thinking that because playwrights are not universally present inside rehearsals. But there is clearly work to be done here. In fostering a sector that is working to dismantle harmful inequity and responsibly engage with artists, there must be better acknowledgement that where labour exists, so must compensation.

In creating a new theatrical work, what would be your definition of a successful experience?

“The perfect creative team: people invested in the project, a good venue/company supporting the work, accessible to audiences.”

“The excited chatter of an audience discussing the show afterward.”

“That the production is done without everyone burning out and the audience is moved to heated discourse. I don't need them to like it, but I want them to talk about it.”

“Producing a work I am proud of and ensuring that the artists involved are fairly compensated.”

“Support from early drafts to first production, then a concerted effort to give that play a life beyond that first production.”

“One in which I see my ideas realized in a safe and supportive environment.”

“Knowing you were going to production from day 1.”

“Awards - Reviews - Bums on seats.”

“If we can create true safe space with healthy dialogue/discussion, even with different views.”

“a lengthy workshop and dramaturgy process with adequate time for rewrites.”

“A premiere production followed by a second production.”

“I'd measure the success by how much freedom there was to respond to change, how the constraints shaped the work, how strongly my primary need was felt in the finished work, how deeply it moved its audience.”

key components of
impact *negative*
during play development

lack of
communication

discrimination

isolation

demoralizing rejections

gatekeeping

insufficient
development

difficulty with
access/dissemination

bad contracts/lack of contracts

bullying burnout
creative differences

(particularly with dramaturgs and directors)



communication
compensation
production
attendance
autonomy
longevity
approval
time

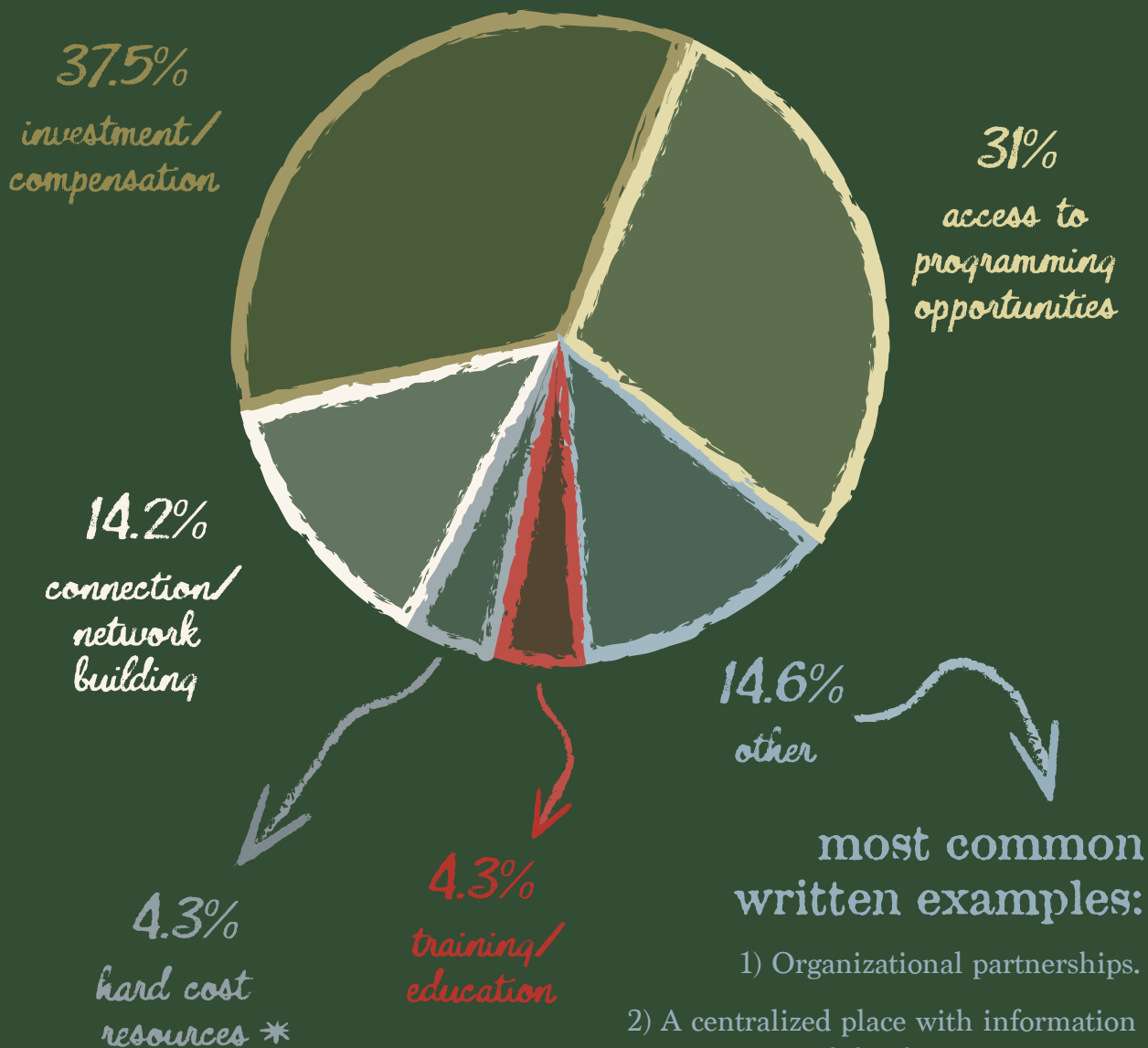
key components of
positive impact
during play development

part four

what if?

looking forward

What would provide the highest impact to your current needs as a playwright?



* Note: this was a significantly higher priority for the french language respondents

the open door

At the conclusion of the survey, playwrights were offered an optional open space to offer their own reflections, with the question “Are there any other comments you would like to share about playwriting in Canada?” A noteworthy 64.2% of respondents opted to contribute additional thoughts. Although fairly varied in the scope and offering, the level of opt-in stands out when considering the pre-pandemic context here. Although surveys and feedback tools would become much more commonly used in the wake of the COVID-19 disruption (with artists becoming increasingly “surveyed out” by the end of 2020), this 2019 statistic speaks to a widespread sensation of exclusion when it comes to playwrights being asked for their thoughts and feedback. With echoing sentiments of gratitude for being invited directly into the conversation, there is clear insight to be gleaned by the overwhelming presence of additional submitted feedback.

A selection of these responses are included in the final section of this report.



database

purpose

- * To compile information surrounding programs and initiatives dedicated to play development across Canada.
- * To analyze the submission process, policies, and methods of engaging with playwrights being utilized by arts organizations.
- * To create a practical resource for artists on Canadian companies and festivals that publicly identify as producing and developing new plays.

format

The information was compiled in a spreadsheet format, with designated tabs pertaining to theatre companies, festivals, play development centres, funders, publishers, and related professional associations. Within each section there are columns breaking down each outlet alphabetically by name, location, website, with contact information for leadership contacts and additional contacts relevant to playwrights, and an overview of their submission policies or programs as applicable.

approach

Theatre companies and play development centres included in the database are organizations who have self-designated as those engaging with "new work" or "play development" with the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres.

The Festivals section includes organizations producing theatre presentations occurring at specific intervals as a dedicated festival entity, and those who self-designated as such inside of their submission to the PACT Theatre Listings. It does not include ad-hoc, interdisciplinary, or Fringe festivals (due to the Fringe mandate of being un-juried).

For the over 100 organizations included in the Theatre Companies and Festivals sections, the contact information, program details, and submission policies were derived from a trio of sources: company/festival submissions for PACT's "Canadian Theatre Listings", organization websites, and direct communication with organizations by phone and email. While efforts were made to connect with every organization that had no information publicly available on how they engage with playwrights and new plays, there are gaps in information details where no responses were received or offered.

The information pertaining to funders, publishers, and service associations provides a broader snapshot of information and contacts, intended to offer a jump off point for artists looking to learn more about what resources may be available in their region or area of practice.

database statistics

play development centres - 10

theatre companies - 80

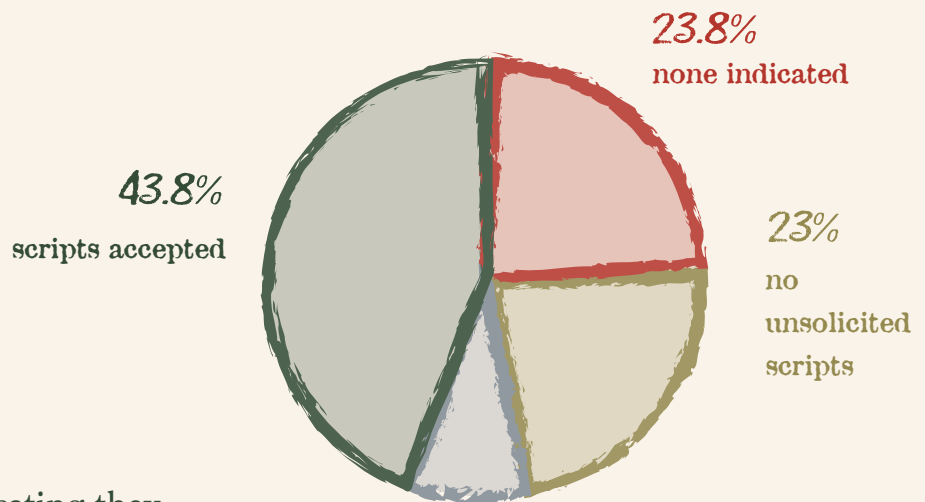
festivals - 21

service organizations - 10

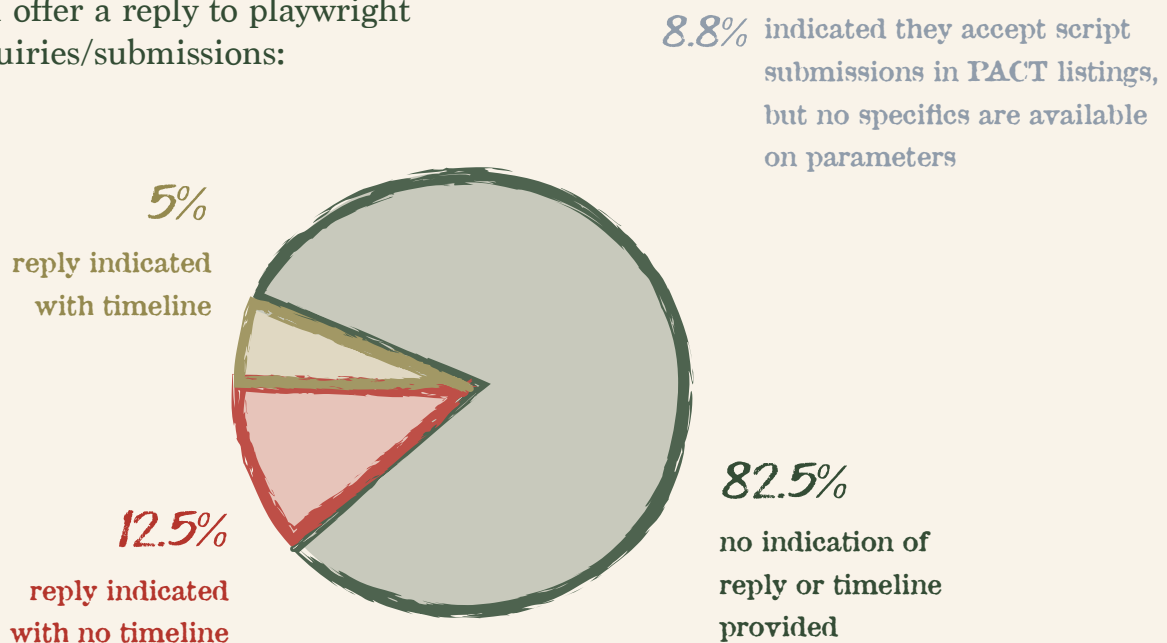
funders - 15

publishers - 10

Theatre companies accepting script submissions from playwrights:

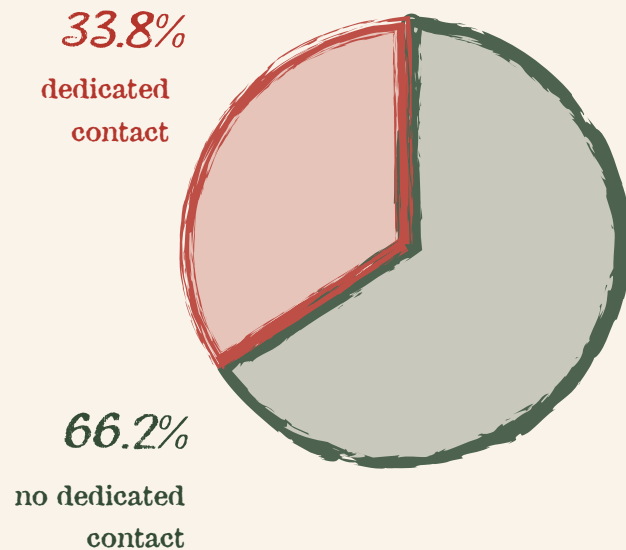


Theatre companies indicating they will offer a reply to playwright inquiries/submissions:



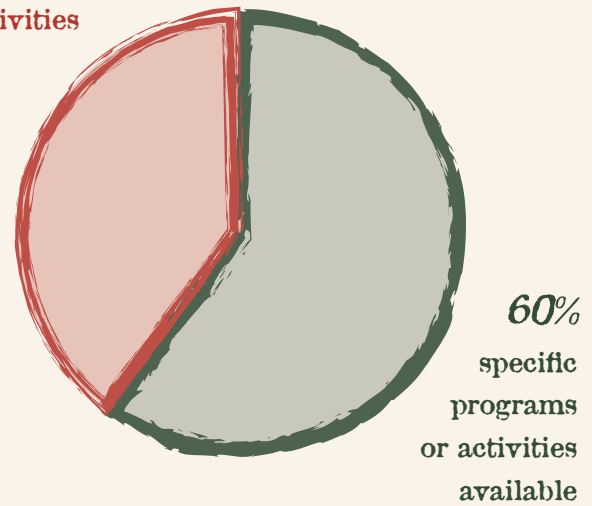
Theatre companies with a dedicated contact for play development:

(This can include Artistic Directors/Company Leadership if playwrights are invited to contact them with inquiries.)

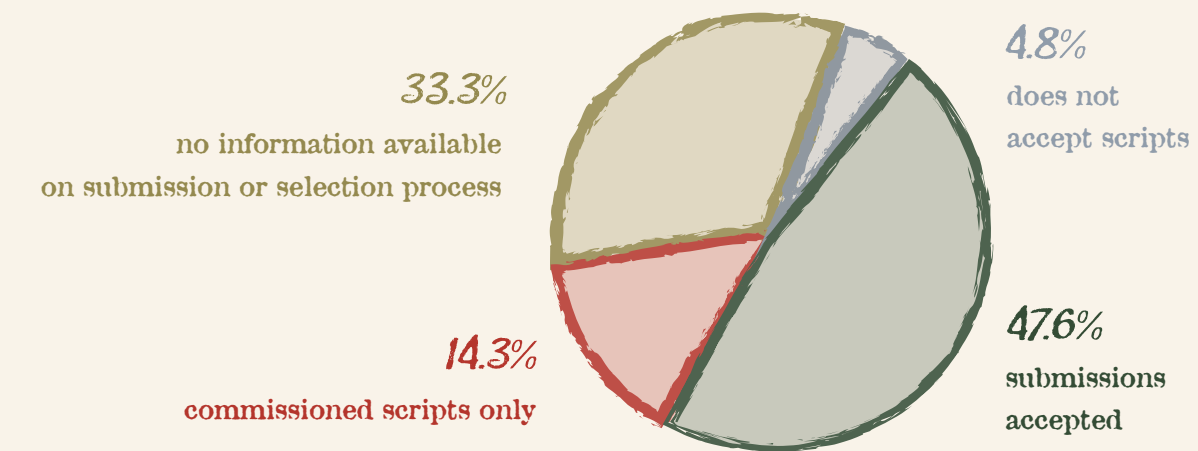


Theatre companies with programs or activity involving playwrights or new work development:

no specific programs or activities
40%



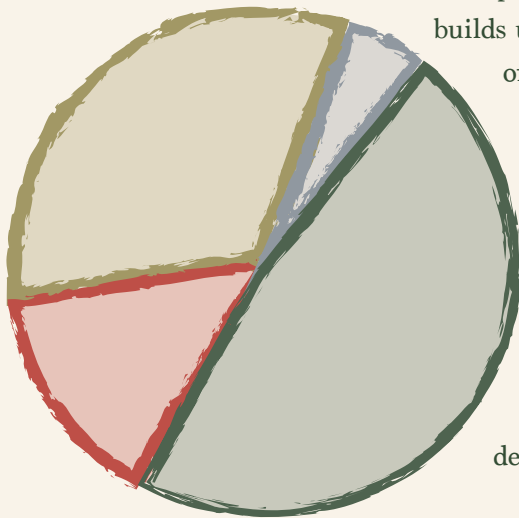
Festivals accepting script submissions from playwrights or new work development:



feeling festive

In the process of compiling information on individual organizations and their approaches to play development, an unexpected detail that appeared was the common reference to festivals and their correlation to new plays. Inside the sector database there are organizations we would commonly refer to as “theatre companies”, standing separate from those carrying the self-identified designation of “festival”, with a large array of activity that falls somewhere in between. While some festivals are clearly differentiated from mainstage organizations by a clear mandate or identity, their own governing body, and recurring presence at a specific time of year (Summer-Works festival in Toronto, for example), there are many festivals that exist in a more ambiguous space. At times operating as offshoots of existing organizations (as with Ottawa’s Undercurrents Festival), specialized programming within the activity of mainstage organizations (Theatre New Brunswick’s Fall Festival of New Plays), and collaborations between organizations offering work under a combined umbrella (Edmonton’s Chinook Series), there is no single approach to the concept. Given its flexible usage throughout the country, the term is used to represent a wide assortment of activity, ranging in scope from single day indie events to six month behemoths.

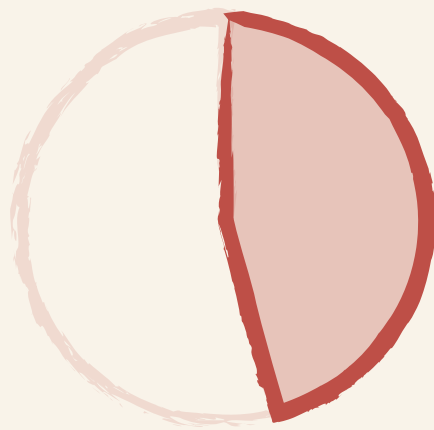
In relation to new plays, there are several reasons a “festival” would become a favorable or preferred format for programming related to play development: grouping together shorter works-in-progress builds up the volume of artistic product inside a ticketed offering, a shorter run festival offers a lower stakes environment to take risks with new and still-evolving material, organizations can potentially derive revenue from the collective buying power of the audience’s interest in a variety of artists which can generate the feasibility required to support the development of more plays. Additionally, with a number of municipal and provincial programs offering dedicated funding and incentives for festival-centric activity in recent years, the proliferation of the term is likely to continue as a method for organizations to support and showcase new and developing works.





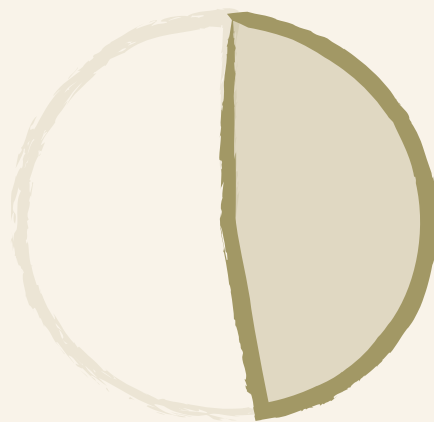
theatre companies
offering festivals

35%



theatre companies
offering residencies

46.3%



theatre companies
offering workshop
opportunities
applicable to
playwrights

45%

the mausoleum

Data, by its very nature, is impersonal.

Its function is to be devoid of any of the residue of human influence or opinion, and should be observed within a handshake of distance and context as much as possible. What exists inside the database developed for this study, is not such a clinical device.

It's a momentary snapshot.
An impression in the sand of a living, vibrant, sector.

As the research database was intended to be a practical resource for playwrights to access as opposed to a tool for assessment and further reporting, the scope of analysis when it comes to the details of the database content is much more limited than the playwright survey.

However, in keeping the timeframe of pre-pandemic ecology in mind, the following are the major observations regarding the information gathered:

- * Script submission policies are generally vague across the board.
- * Few companies offer information regarding their policy on submissions.
- * Of those organizations that accept script submissions, most do not indicate a timeline or offer of response.
- * A large percentage of companies self-designate as producers of new work.
- * The majority of organizations who self-designate with new work do not accept submissions or offer information about how they create or develop new plays.
- * The most common method of playwright engagement is an offer for interested artists to contact the company with information or invitations to upcoming work.

Overall:
there is a disconnect apparent between organizations who have an outward interest in play development and those who have a demonstrated relationship with it. And while a theatre company not being opposed to new work is not the same as supporting or developing new work, it is encouraging to see the amount of companies championing the idea of being a space for new plays and the artists who create them.

While offering a unique and valuable opportunity to assess the Canadian ecology for playwrights immediately before a global disaster, upon viewing the database it is necessary to recognize the devastating fallout of the pandemic between its creation and subsequent release.

Among the columns of information, there are organizations that have been forced to restructure, downsize, and cease operations entirely.

Many play development programs and initiatives have since been discontinued, reimaged, or remain indefinitely on hold.

Most visibly, a staggering amount of staff and artists have experienced layoffs, furlough, and job loss due to pandemic-related turnover, rendering the contact lists in particular within the database to now be largely retrospective.

Instead of a tool to create introductions, it is a space which chronicles in a significant way what was also lost.

So perhaps more accurately, the database could now be considered a fossil.

Within this collection of environmental samples, there is recognition for the life residing in these spaces and also crucial insight offered for an extraordinary moment in time.



access
the
database
here



conclusion

direct from the source

In the initial stage of this research, I reviewed with great interest Ben Henderson's study "Creation To Production: A Report for Playwrights Theatre Centre". As it was a founding source of APN's interest in creating this project, I was keen to see what this anecdotal approach to research had yielded nearly fifteen years earlier in analyzing the path from concept-to-completion for new plays in Canada. Among the findings, which included fascinating comparisons to American and UK approaches, it summarized that at that time (a wild, wonderful, pre-internet era) the Canadian model bestowed a high level of importance on the involvement of a well-connected dramaturg and the playwright's ability to build personal relationships with decision makers. Reflecting on this, I am humbled to be witnessing in real time a period of significant change inside the sector. Evolving in fits, starts, discourse, and occasional baby steps - there are encouraging signs of progress. Shifting away from a system where opportunities for new plays are determined by an playwright's ability to be naturally charming at a party, and toward one which is forging new paths of access.

We are witnessing the painstaking, exciting, and laborious growth of the sector's capacity for dialog; thinking deeper about not just what we are putting in front of audiences, but how we are putting it there and with whom. But in keeping up this promising momentum, there is an urgent need for greater transparency within the Canadian theatre ecology. As we attempt to nourish progress, the system can not consider its work to be completed, as this work is never truly done. And while there is much frustration compiled here from the hundreds of artists and arts leaders we connected with during this research, I am also struck by the hope that lives within many of these responses. It contagiously offers me the same. Through their words we see that where there is passion there is also a willingness and a commitment to continue, and I am honoured to share their thoughts.

“I've always found it difficult to connect with playwrights and producers as we all tend to hold our cards so closely to our chests.”

“We have a hard time being each other's allies and advocates, because we are also inherently each other's competition...”

“Workshops and public readings kill the excitement and surprise of a new script.”

“There should be more translation INTO French!”

“With diminished funding, being a Canadian playwright is like being a skilled pianist that has access to 22 keys and can only use one hand.”

“We really need a strategy that changes playwriting from a vocation to a sustainable career without the need for a day job.”

are there any other comments you would like to share about playwriting in Canada?

“It's stupid and I'm stupid for doing it.”

“We need recognition for non-traditional practices.”

“I'm optimistic that theatres are programming more Canadian work.”

“I'm tired of talented Canadian writers competing with dead Brits or Americans for stage time.”

“We need to make more space for trans/non-binary narrative.”

“Fringe artists are making excellent work but no-one from mainstream theatre ever talks to us, sees our work or engages with us.”

“We need to be paid for being at rehearsals for the premiere of a new play. A commission is never enough to cover that time.”

“In order to make writing shine, it is necessary to support the authors, but also the associations that represent them.”

"I would love for emerging playwrights to have a better understanding of what the role of a dramaturg is."

"I am really excited about the next gen of playwrights in Canada."

"We need more training. We need more space for people to gather and have a dialogue about writing."

"It certainly isn't a way to make a living. However, it is a marvellous way to make a life."

"I have heard it said that getting a play produced in Canada is like winning the lottery."

"I wish more development centres had programs specifically based on getting playwrights produced or helping playwrights produce their own work."

"We are really focused on world premieres. Plays shouldn't have one production and then its life is over."

"For those who have lived through decades of patriarchal toxicity, to live to see that changing has been worth hanging in despite the hard road."



"I wish development opportunities wouldn't come with age limits."

"We should be proud to share our stories and most importantly, never be afraid to write in our languages."

"Mentorship is essential to writers."

"With equity, diversity, and inclusion, it's our processes that need to be changed, not just the surface details (i.e. not just statistical demographics)."

"A stronger support and recognition of the value of all TYA as an Artform and not JUST an adjunct to education."

"I wish we could convince the actors union to let us record the whole production so that we can share it with potential producers and theatres."

The background is a light green color. On the left side, there is a large, textured red shape that looks like a brushstroke. Several thin lines radiate from a small black dot near the bottom left corner. One line is black and goes towards the top left. Another is black and goes towards the top right. A third is black and goes towards the bottom right. A fourth is orange and goes towards the bottom left. A thin red line also radiates from the black dot towards the right. In the top right corner, there is a small blue circular shape with horizontal lines.

recommendations

for organizations
and agencies within
the sector



employ a policy for submissions

Organizations indicating a defined set of guidelines outlining how inquiries and submissions from playwrights are handled go a long way toward fostering welcoming relationships with artists who may wish to connect with a company. It's important to emphasize that the hope is not for all organizations everywhere to suddenly accept play submissions or script pitches, but instead that the company will consider and articulate the manner in which they best can engage with interested artists and make those paths known. Encouraging examples of these policies include: publicly available information on whether the company accepts script submissions, a timeline of when submissions can be received, format for submissions (i.e, a full script, selection of pages, single page with information on cast breakdown/synopsis/why it is a good fit for this company), indication of what type of plays/artists the company is currently interested in, accessibility options, and a point of contact for submissions or questions.

2

abandon the one-size-fits-all development model

A meaningful step inside the process of dismantling the colonial and hierarchical practices associated with play development includes stepping away from the mindset which traditionally dictates a draft/read/workshop/repeat model as the path for new plays. Leaving space inside the budgeting, scheduling, and planning to allow room for playwrights to connect with necessary collaborators, cultural supports, accessible workspaces, TIME, and artist-driven metrics of progress are just a handful of ways that development can be productive and effective. These methods, while deviating from a perhaps more comfortable (and predictable) mode of development, serve to ultimately center the needs of the work; building new habits of conversation which allows support to go further and artists to risk bolder.

3

develop a communication policy for artist inquiries

As with the submission policy, this directive can be reasonably simple or fairly detailed, depending on the organization and the type of work/artists they engage with. The most basic approach includes a publicly available indication that artists who submit plays or inquiries will not hear back unless selected for further steps or more information is desired.

The important thing is to establish a system, commit to what is realistic, and stick to it.

Avoiding the more dehumanizing shortcuts such as generic rejection emails BCC'd to a group, or notifications which are sent long after the results were said to be determined, a well-rounded communication policy offers information up to and including:

- * email confirmation of receipt
- * information on how inquiries are processed
- * information on who is involved with reviewing submissions
- * indication on whether any feedback is offered (which can be general or specific)
- * timeline and mode of reply, if any.

This can be a broad estimation (i.e. email reply within 8-12 months) or more specific (i.e. personalized letter or message within 5 business days of receipt/deadline/submission window)

4

eliminate stipulations based on age

Organizations can create greater access in areas of historical exclusion by reassessing the application criteria for programs and submission opportunities which place limitations on eligibility based on age. While certain programs are intended specifically to engage with artists in youth or senior demographics, separating the boundary of age from any criteria regarding training or development opportunities provides space for a wider variety of artists, and takes into account those who have newly transitioned into their practice, existing practitioners committed to new areas of learning, and those who have not benefited from the economic, societal, or geographical privilege associated with pursuing artistic training from a young age.

5

expand the definition of local

The relationship between arts organizations and the idea of “local” is consistently tied up with matters of funding, with funding sources at a municipal or provincial level understandably favouring activity which benefits and promotes the region they represent. This recommendation is offered as a call for organizations to assess how their programs and opportunities may serve to invite in artists who are historically excluded by virtue of their location being outside of the larger serviced centres. By allowing a wider geographical breadth for program applications or artist submissions (i.e. eligibility for artists within a 300km radius of the base city, as opposed to the municipal border), allocating a portion of budget towards subsidizing travel costs for regional artists/participants to attend events or presentations, creating inclusion pathways for out of town artists to regularly participate in activities through video conferencing - these methods expand on the logistical notion of community and offer meaningful connection to capable artists who would otherwise be unable due to distance or other means.

6

support for existing works/ second productions

There is a substantial need for a reform across the Canadian sector regarding the programming and support of second and subsequent productions. In acknowledging the difficult track record for Canadian plays continuing to receive production beyond their initial premiere, there is work to be done in all facets of the sector in order to address the unfortunate and unnecessary waste of artistic resources.

- Producing organizations are asked to prioritize second and subsequent productions as part of their overall programming strategies
- Organizations of all sizes are asked to consider opportunities for inter-provincial collaborations, allowing multiple companies to pool resources which allow for post-premiere plays to find audiences across the country
- Funding agencies are requested to review how their investment and grant programs can incentivize activity related to second and subsequent productions of Canadian plays, addressing the bias and emphasis toward premieres
- Play development centres can offer eligibility and support within their programs for artists to specifically develop their work beyond an initial production
- Service institutions can make concerted efforts to amplify the need for support of second and subsequent productions within Canada
- Training institutions can assist with incorporating recently premiered or single production works into their play study, analysis, and production activities

7

carving space for feedback

The presence of feedback can be the oxygen of healthy and sustainable artistic ecology, and the door for conversation is at its best when it opens in both directions.

Outbound: While many organizations are limited in the amount of feedback they can offer playwrights regarding their inquiries or script submissions, every opportunity for writers to better understand how their work is being received or progressing is highly valuable. Understanding that the personnel and time that goes into generating personalized feedback on each submission is largely prohibitive for most outlets, employing a system of general notes which apply to larger pools of submission processes can be a tool to offer acknowledgement and support for artists who have worked to submit and be a motivating factor in continuing to connect with any company.

Inbound: In tandem with any organization's publicly available submission policy, there is an additional need for artists, the public, and community members, to be able to offer thoughts and questions. This recommendation encourages the use of active and regular invitations for members of the community (both artistic and beyond) to share their insights through the use of surveys, direct invitations for response through email/social media/direct conversation, and anonymous submission forms via an organizational website.

8

contract reform

Within the scope of play development, it is critical that we bring an end to contracting which perpetuates pay exclusion for playwrights between workshop and premiere. Beyond the existing standards for contracts which account for minimums associated with draft writing and separate allocations for time in workshop/reading, agreements which account for the time and labour associated with a playwright being present in rehearsals is an immediate need for organizations at all levels.

The weight of any cultural shift falls upon many,

and while changes in pay perspectives don't also magically correspond to an increase in available budgets, organizations can do their part by offering fair compensation for playwrights inside rehearsal outside of the commission fee or production royalty.

Service organizations are asked to advocate for playwrights inside of establishing an applicable fee schedule (as exists for performers and design professionals), development centres can serve to educate their artists on how to advocate for their rights inside of a negotiation process, and artists are encouraged to be outspoken inside of contract conversations when it comes to the impact of having role in rehearsals and the impact on fees related to premiere.

a note regarding equity, diversity, and inclusion practices

As the sector undergoes important shifts in connection to anti-racism and the dismantling of colonial practices and white supremacy, there is much inside of the accounts gathered in this study that highlights the immediate necessity of this work.

Experiences of racism, abuse, bullying, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism are described in all areas of the survey, and within the information gathered there is particular emphasis regarding the presence of gatekeeping when it comes to the playwrights and plays that are selected for opportunities.

Active efforts are crucial not only going forward but also in recognition and repair of the access which has been denied in these rooms and on these stages for generations.

Quite simply - when it comes to creating safe spaces for IBPOC and marginalized artists in the sector, the time for recommendations is over and the time for transformation and accountability is now.

9

follow up study

Within the scope of research collected here, the need for follow up study and comparative data is vital.

While not the original intention of the project, this inadvertent assembly of firsthand accounts has generated a highly specific “before” picture of the experience of playwrights in Canada preceding a global emergency. These insights offer an important space for conversation now, but will only reach its full value once there is an “after” picture to measure next to it.

Follow up study will serve to not only gauge the intricate and still unknown lasting impact of an industry thrown into turmoil, but will also provide the national ecology with an indispensable measure of progress.

With a similar longform follow-up in 2025, the resulting exploration will function as a barometer into how promises made have yielded industry change, or where continued calls to action are needed.

As with the study of any ecology, one doesn't just test the soil once and draw conclusions. It's through the rigour of continued evaluation, reflection, and analysis that the scope and significance of any experiment is ever known.

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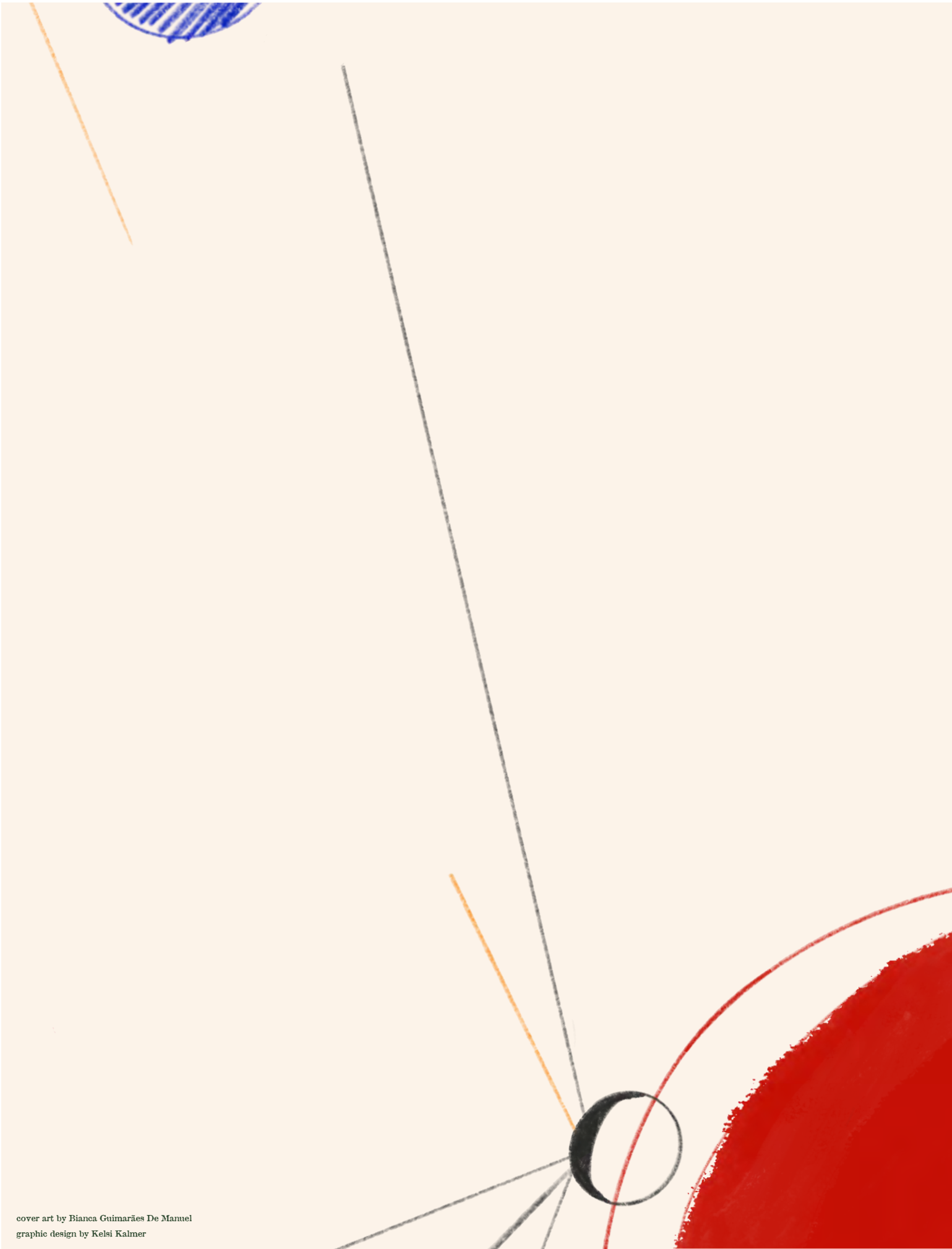
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