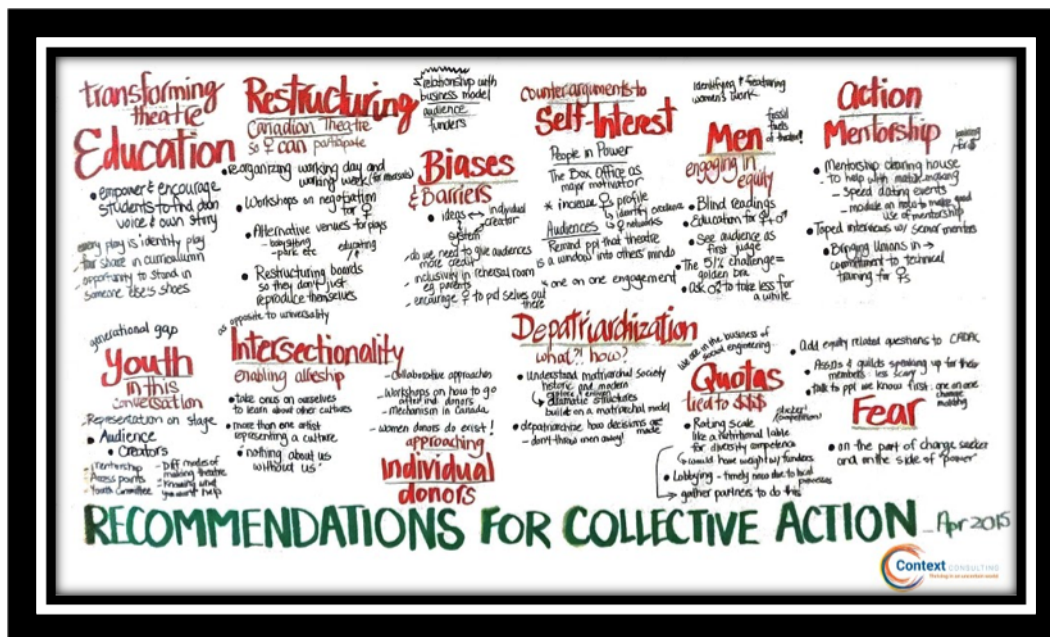


Change in Action

A Toolkit for Challenging Gender Inequities in Canadian Theatre



"Recommendations for Collective Action" created by Aftab Erfan, Equity in Theatre Symposium 2015

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Table of Contents

Introduction: Who We Are	2
Hello from EIT!	2
Where We're At: An Environmental Scan	2
What's Been Done: Methodology	3
Part One: Making a Plan	4
Moving Forward: Strategic Planning	4
Moving Forward: Preparation	5
Part Two: Action Suggestions	6
For Individuals	6
For Audiences and Theatre Practitioners	6
For Educators	7
For Theatres and Festivals	7
For Administrations	8
For Arts Councils	8
Take Action with Equity in Theatre	9
Resources	10

Introduction: Who We Are

Equity in Theatre (EIT) is a multi-stakeholder initiative with an overarching objective to remedy existing gender and related inequities in the theatre industry. Through a multi-pronged and inclusive response that involves the community as a whole (artists, stakeholders, and audiences), we promote dialogue, generate greater awareness of and exposure to women theatre practitioners, and develop community-based action plans to help fix industry imbalances.

EIT is run out of the Playwrights Guild of Canada and is partnered with the following groups: Artists Driving Holistic Organizational Change; Associated Designers of Canada; Canadian Actors' Equity Association; Cultural Pluralism in the Arts Movement Ontario; Deaf, Disabled and Mad Arts Alliance of Canada; Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance; Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas (Canada); Pat the Dog Theatre Creation; and, the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres.

Advocacy 101

If you don't consider yourself an activist, think again. Every time you attend a show, support an artist, or vote in an election, you are helping to shape the direction of Canadian theatre. This is a good thing! These kinds of actions, from the smallest scale to the largest, can positively change the persistent gender and cultural diversity disparities evident in Canadian theatre.

Below are suggestions and templates for strategic action to help shift the theatre ecology. With this toolkit, which includes seven steps for implementing a strategic plan, we can increase theatre's relevance to our population, encourage greater involvement with Canada's varied and distinct communities, and help articulate better the need for a variety of perspectives that speak to our nation's identity on an (inter)national level.

Where Things Are At: An Environmental Scan

While there have been incremental increases in the statistics in the past thirty-five years, women are still crucially underrepresented in major artistic roles in Canadian theatre. As outlined in EIT's report, "Achieving Equity in Theatre," key roles (such as artistic directors, directors, playwrights, designers, and so forth) in Canadian theatre today demonstrate a division of men and women that is roughly split 70/30. The extent of the imbalance varies depending on position, and there is concern that the divide has been increasing. For women playwrights, the percentage of staged productions increased incrementally from the late 1970s through to the 2000s, but since the 2010s, the numbers have stagnated, and

alarming, in some years, have regressed backwards. While forming just over 50% of the Playwrights Guild of Canada's membership, women playwrights currently account for one-quarter of the plays produced on our nation's professional stages.

This kind of underrepresentation does not affect women only. There is a significant need for future research into how these key roles break down in terms of other minoritized groups, including people of colour, Aboriginal folks, immigrants, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ peoples, who are also marginalized, and doubly so if they identify as women.

Despite severe imbalances on stage and in major artistic roles, women constitute the majority of theatre audiences in all demographic categories. Statistics Canada data from 2010 indicates that women are more likely than men to attend theatre performances (49% compared to 40%), and men are 37% less likely than women to attend plays. Canadians who belong to minoritized groups attend theatre less often than other respondents, however, within these groups, women are more likely to attend theatre than men.

While women comprise over half of all theatre school students, they make-up less than 30% of the profession's creative leaders, and earn less than men in major artistic roles. Countries with comparable English-language theatre industries and traditions such as Australia, Britain, and the United States, demonstrate similar barriers for women working in the theatre industry, and comparable levels of (un)employment. Gender inequity in theatre is not exclusive to the Canadian theatre industry; rather, it is an international phenomenon.

What's Been Done: Methodology

In order to create actionable responses to gender and other imbalances in the Canadian theatre industry, EIT needed more information. Released in April 2015, ["Achieving Equity in Canadian Theatre: A Report with Best Practice Recommendations"](#) provides a first step for articulating a collective vision of gender equity.

With this report, we investigate current systemic barriers facing women within the Canadian theatre industry, and look for solutions by examining past equity initiatives in theatre that have failed or succeeded, and by exploring other equity initiatives implemented in fields and industries outside of theatre.

From there, we held panel discussions across the country, and hosted an EIT Symposium at the Theatre Centre in Toronto on April 27, 2015. About a hundred Canadian theatre workers, including amateurs, professionals, and academics, came together at the Symposium to collaborate and discuss potential resolutions.

We brainstormed solutions and “harvested” recommendations for collective actions, mapping out potential next steps and goals as a community.

Following the Symposium, Equity in Theatre hosted an international conference with similar equity-seeking organizations based in the United States. The day was used to review what occurred at our national symposium, and to seek-out strategies that unite our countries under the common goal of gender equity.

Part One: Making a Plan

Below is a step-by-step guideline for organizing your thoughts and purposefully planning an action, movement, or campaign:

Moving Forward: Strategic Action

1. What is your goal?

Before you can act, you must identify what it is you want, and then select a goal to achieve that aim. What you want may be as broad as, “I want more women in key creative positions in theatre.” Be clear with your goal. The more specific you can be, the better (especially for measuring results). What is it you want to achieve?

2. Who is the target?

Who can help you reach your goal? The answer to this question may involve many different components, depending on the desired outcome. Some goals could be achieved best by appealing to theatre audiences, who choose to support work by buying tickets, or by drawing the attention of the media who could support your advocacy, or by lobbying politicians and funding bodies whose platforms may exclude these issues, or by reaching out to artistic directors and other decision-makers whose choices dictate what is depicted onstage. Whatever your focus may be, once you define your target audience(s), you can identify the pressure points, and specify your actions to affect this group.

3. What is the message?

Your message must be persuasive to your target audience. If you have multiple targets, alter your message to suit individual audiences. A general appeal tends not to be effective. How can you find commonality with your target group? Where do your desires and their needs intersect?

4. Who are the messengers?

Even when tailored specifically for the audience, your message will have a different impact depending on who communicates it. For some audiences you will need “experts” to deliver your message. Other audiences will be more influenced

by “real people” who speak from their personal experiences. Who does your target audience listen to?

5. Who are your allies?

Who shares your goals? Do you know friends, organizations, or leaders who would support this action? Who (or what) are the groups or individuals that have some influence with your target audience?

6. What are your tactics?

Your tactics will be dependent on your target audience and the way you choose to conduct your action. Your methods can vary from the less intrusive, such as attending a show or writing a letter, to the more aggressive, as with face-to-face meetings or demonstration marches.

Keep in mind that an action is singular; one tactic. The most effective campaigns include a variety of tactics that are appropriate to various situations and individuals.

7. How do you get started?

What’s the best way to begin? Depending on your goal, it might be bringing people together to discuss issues, creating a list of the people you need to influence, or identifying local media figures that might cover your particular issue. Select your entry point and get going!

Moving Forward: Preparation

Know your Target Audience: What issues are important to your target audience? Read up on their interests, which will vary from target to target. If you’re targeting a theatre, what is its mandate? What is of interest to the Artistic Director? If you’re reaching out to an audience, who is the audience you’re seeking out? What kind of theatre attendees are they? What shows appeal to this demographic? The interests of your target audience are vitally important to your approach.

Compile Relevant Research: Have recent information on hand to support the reasons for your actions. EIT’s website “Stats” page is a good place to pull information, as are the websites of PACT, CAEA, or PGC, depending on your focus.

Be Positive and Provide Solutions: Identifying a problem or problems is the first step. Highlighting these problems for your target audience will not necessarily incite change. Follow-up actions provide a step toward the solution. Speak positively. Highlight your proactivity, and make it easy for others to build from there.

Be Organized: If you are part of a group, decide who is responsible for what tasks. Follow-up on all actions and hold your core group accountable. If you’re

organizing an action on your own, keep track of who you're in contact with and what has been completed. Keep key information on hand.

Be Available to Connect: Provide a way for outside interests to get in contact with you, by phone, through email, or if your action is more informal, through a Facebook page and/or Twitter account. Be consistent with your mode(s) of communication.

Part Two: Strategic Action Suggestions

These suggested actions are the products of research and input from international organizations and our own community in Canada. They were created so that everyone – from arts funders to the most sporadic audience member – can make informed choices towards equity in their theatre involvement. Take a look at the suggestions below, and see what you can apply to your work, your practice, or your involvement in the theatre industry.

Suggestions for Individuals, Regardless of Affiliation:

- Lobby governments to create legislation requiring employers to enact equity plans.
- Lobby arts councils to require theatres to enact equity plans as a funding condition.

Contacting legislators and lobbying government bodies is essential for enacting top-down changes in the theatre industry. For more detailed information on bottom-up, grassroots, and organizational advocacy approaches, see the Resources page at the end of this document.

Suggestions for Audiences and Theatre Practitioners:

- Vote with your ticket: choose to attend works created by women and other marginalized communities.
- Form meet-up groups and organize outings to plays by women and productions featuring an equitable number of artistic and technical roles for women.
- Write theatres in support or condemnation of their gender, diversity, and equity efforts.
- Recognize and support individual playwrights who create strong roles for women, people of colour, and other marginalized groups.
- Use social media to support women-friendly initiatives, such as #FringeFemme, a hashtag developed for the L.A. Fringe to draw attention to works created by women.
- Participate in hackathons to promote women artists' visibility online.
- Make connections by encouraging women in other art forms outside of theatre and suggesting crossover support.

- Curate a list of plays by women and other equity-seeking groups and make it publicly available online.
- Vocally encourage the need for women's voices, online and in person.
- Ally with colleagues belonging to the same professional organizations to advocate for pay equity between masculinized and feminized jobs.

Suggestions for Educators:

- Increase the percentage of plays by women and other marginalized groups taught in elementary schools, high schools, and postsecondary institutions.
- Select works by women and other underrepresented people for production.
- Develop, document, and disseminate approaches to teaching acting and directing that deconstruct gender, racialization, and other constructs.
- Encourage gender-blind reading and casting in all school activities.

Suggestions for Theatres and Festivals:

- Feature work by women and other marginalized communities onstage and in festivals.
- Implement quotas when selecting and staffing plays.
- Host gender- and colour-conscious readings for development work.
- Reorganize working days or rehearsal weeks to allow for childcare, or to allow for small children in the rehearsal room.
- Restructure Boards of Directors to reflect the demographics of your audiences. Or, mandate ethno-cultural and gender parity on your Board.
- Host or run a Women's Voices Festival or similar project in your region. For example, Ruby Slippers Theatre produced the "Advance Theatre" series in partnership with EIT and the Vancouver Fringe Festival in 2015. Over five days, they hosted sold-out readings of new works by women. The series was so successful they rebooted the series for a second year.
- Collect data regarding ticket sales for productions to better understand what work appeals to your audiences.
- Participate and support national and international equity movements, such as 50/50 in 2020, an American initiative to have 50/50 employment parity in theatre by the year 2020.
- Use women's theatre companies and play festivals to create opportunities for collaboration, learning, production, and publication.
- Initiate conversations with commissioned playwrights about roles for women; encourage playwrights to create meaningful and diverse roles.
- Create a resource kit for pregnant actors, outlining responsibilities and considerations for both actors and their employers.
- Offer management development and mentorship programs to train women to become artistic directors.
- Support the advancement of assistant directors to directors by providing mentorship, training, and fellowships.

Suggestions for Administrations:

- Start initiatives that encourage diversity in the theatre industry and provide support.
For example, in 2015 The Professional Association of Canadian Theatres' (PACT) Diversity Committee presented a challenge to the members of its organization: to publicly declare an action they plan to take on to help achieve greater equity in their company and, by extension, in our industry. Members chose their pledges based on their company's ability, knowing that their actions, big or small, make a big picture difference. PACT's Diversity Committee follows-up on these challenges by offering support to the members who make pledges.
- Conduct a self-study to assess gaps in gender and other equity practices in organizational policies and operations.
- Set company targets to achieve and enforce parity in hiring.
- Partner with educational institutions to provide training to underrepresented groups, such as women lighting and sound designers.
- Offer courses for women to improve their leadership and negotiation skills.
- Host live networking events for artists to meet regularly to connect, discuss gender parity, build community, and brainstorm ideas for advocacy.
- Use online platforms to connect women artists with each other and with employment opportunities and commissions.
- Create awards for theatre companies that meet equity targets.
- Arrange group trips and discounts for women's productions to make theatres aware of the demand for women's work.
- Provide "virtual mentorship" by posting detailed profiles of successful women practitioners on your organization's website.

Suggestions for Arts Councils:

- Instate gender and diversity quotas that are tied to funding.
- Include gender as part of the funding criteria along with diversity and related considerations.
- Track statistics of total applicants and funding allotted to successful applicants, and make these statistics available to the public.
- Audit funded bodies and people for more information on how funding is awarded. Are women receiving more funding for projects, rather than operational funding? Are they asking for and/or receiving funds at the same rate as men?
- Consistently hold all juries to a standard gender split of 50/50.
- Create standing committees with women from every area of the industry to make recommendations about the Arts Councils' policies and programs.
- Establish gender equity policies and/or special incentives for employment equity for theatre companies receiving government funding.
- Include childcare costs as professional expenses covered by grants made to theatres and individual artists.
- Provide incentives to individual companies that provide employees and patrons with childcare services and/or subsidies.

- Create incentives for the publication of plays and anthologies that highlight the contributions of women and marginalized communities in Canada.
- Support organizations that use substantial funding for research, documentation, and publications that improve the current imbalance in materials regarding women and diversity in Canadian theatre.
- Establish funds of considerable value to subsidize programs aimed at assisting women in the production of theatre (e.g. training, apprenticeship and mentorship, artists' colonies for women, showcases or festivals of women's work, newsletters and/or arts advocacy organizations).
- Make funding available to companies and organizations aiming to make their events and venues accessible to people with different abilities (e.g. ASL Interpretation at theatre performances).
- Require theatre companies to comply with the international and national human rights and employment equity agreements set forth, for instance, by the Federal Contractors Program for all government-funded entities. This legislation applies in all areas of federal jurisdiction, and that should include the Canada Council and its award recipients.
- Increase funding for women's theatre companies and festivals to help move work from development to production.

Take Action with Equity in Theatre

Equity in Theatre will be rolling-out our own initiatives based on these recommendations over the next two years. Contact us at equityintheatre@gmail.com if you'd like to get involved with any of our projects!

Disseminate EIT Report Highlights to Major Funders, 2016

Equity in Theatre will begin a targeted dissemination campaign of our research findings in the fall of 2016. Our summary of recommendations and toolkit will be sent to funders and government officials. This will be done online and by mail to raise awareness about systemic inequity and possible avenues of redress.

Hackathon, March 2017

This will be a nation-wide event scheduled around International Women's Day. Women artists not only receive less funding overall, but less press coverage and visibility in online databases. A hackathon is an event during which a group of people come together and "hack" internet databases such as Wikipedia and Performance Wiki to increase online visibility of women artists from anywhere in the world.

Seal of Approval Campaign, 2017

EIT will be launching a reward campaign in 2017, granting a "seal of approval" to productions that feature and promote gender equity in their work.

Resources

- “The ABC’s of Advocacy” – by Canadian Conference for the Arts. This toolkit provides suggestions for strategy and getting your word out.
<http://ccarts.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/ABCs-of-advocacy-5jan2012.pdf>
- “The Art of Advocacy” – by Canadian Conference for the Arts. This is an advocacy handbook with tips and steps for non-profit organizations.
https://ccednet-rcdec.ca/sites/ccednet-rcdec.ca/files/art_of_advocacy_en_online.pdf
- PACT’s “Advocacy Resources” series - by the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres. This collection of tips and templates provides an outline for organizing an advocacy meeting with your MP.
<http://pact.ca/Advocacy/Advocacy-Resources.aspx>
- “Achieving Equity in Canadian Theatre: A Report with Best Practice Recommendations” – by Dr. Michelle MacArthur. This is EIT’s in-depth report on the state of gender equity in Canadian theatre, with further suggestions and strategies to combat inequity.
<http://eit.playwrightsguild.ca/achieving-equity-canadian-theatre>
- “How to Advocate 101” – by Pat the Dog Theatre Creation. This resource outlines simple tips and steps for getting started as an advocate.
<http://playwrightsguild.ca/sites/default/files/How%20to%20Advocate%20101.pdf>
- “Political Advocacy for your Theatre” - by Theatre Communications Group. This “Grassroots Kit” will help you conduct visits with your legislators at all levels of government.
http://www.tcg.org/pdfs/advocacy/grassroots_kit.pdf
- “7 Steps for Gender Parity in Theatre” - by Martha Richards of WomenArts. This article provides general suggestions for achieving gender parity.
<http://www.americantheatre.org/2015/06/09/7-steps-for-achieving-gender-parity-in-the-theatre/>
- Be sure to continually check Equity in Theatre’s Resources and Social Action pages for new additions, tips, and recommendations over time.
www.eit.playwrightsguild.ca

