

EIT Best Practice Recommendations

The following is a summation of the kinds of strategies and action plans that can be implemented to help improve equity in Canadian theatre. They are drawn primarily from Michelle MacArthur's recent report, "Achieving Equity in Canadian Theatre: A Report with Best Practice Recommendations," which is available in full or as a 4-page Executive Summary on the EIT website (www.eit.playwrightsguild.ca). The recommendations are derived from initiatives undertaken in Canada and abroad, in theatre and elsewhere, divided here into four key areas:

Education

- Increase the percentage of plays by women and other marginalized groups taught and performed at elementary schools, high schools, and post-secondary institutions
- Develop, document, and disseminate approaches to teaching acting and directing that deconstruct gender
- Generate curriculum at the post-secondary and conservatory level to expose students to the gendered realities of professional theatre and develop their leadership and problem-solving skills to overcome these barriers
- Create a Women's Leadership and Professional Development Institute to prepare women for careers as directors, artistic directors, and executive directors

Mentorship, Networking, and Extended Training

- Increase funding for women's theatre companies and festivals to help them move from developing women's work to producing it
- Offer management development and mentorship programs to train women to become artistic directors and courses to foster leadership and negotiation skills
- Provide "virtual mentorship" by posting detailed profiles of successful women online
- Develop and distribute directories of women artists; use online platforms to connect women artists with each other and with employment opportunities and commissions
- Increase the number of women in leadership positions to act as role models for women in earlier stages of their careers
- Recruit men as mentors for early-career artists, especially in areas where it is difficult to find women mentors due to their underrepresentation
- Orient intensive mentorship programs towards creative outcomes, recruiting participants with diverse skill sets to collaborate on play creation and production
- Host live networking events for artists to meet regularly to connect, discuss gender parity, build community, and brainstorm ideas for advocacy

Theatre Administration

- Conduct internal audits of administrative practices and identify weaknesses
- Set organizational targets to achieve and enforce parity
- Ensure that gender is not subsumed under overarching institutional goals or ambiguous diversity mandates, and clearly articulate goals related to recruiting and retaining more women

- Develop policies and procedures to ensure that theatres comply with human rights laws and professional codes of conduct
- Require administration, hiring managers, and creators to take self-assessment tests to uncover their own biases
- Remove all indicators of gender, age, and race from decision making contexts
- Create consistent interview processes that aim to eliminate bias and discrimination
- Use a blind submission process for vetting scripts
- Rectify imbalances by programming more work by women and people of colour
- Take advantage of resources (such as the EIT database) to recruit more women
- Track demographics about women within individual theatre companies to aid in the development and implementation of equity initiatives; collect these statistics annually to identify trends and changes over time
- Create flexible work environments that accommodate different needs, such as those of parents and elder care providers
- Initiate conversations with commissioned playwrights about roles for women; encourage playwrights to create more meaningful roles for women
- Support the advancement of assistant directors to directors by providing mentorship, training, and fellowships
- Partner with educational institutions to provide training to underrepresented groups, such as women lighting and sound designers
- Ally with colleagues belonging to the same professional organizations to advocate for pay equity between masculinized and feminized jobs
- Create a resource kit for pregnant actors, outlining responsibilities and considerations for both actors and their employers
- Lobby the government to create legislation requiring employers to institute equality plans
- Lobby arts councils to require theatres to institute equality plans and/or meet equity targets as a condition of funding

Advocacy and Awareness

- Form audience advocacy groups to organize outings to plays by women and productions featuring an equitable number of artistic and technical roles for women; arrange discounts to these productions and make theatres aware of the demand for women's work
- Assemble lists of companies that have the best and poorest records of hiring women and minorities and publicly disseminate them
- Create a system to rate representations of women (using the Bechdel test perhaps)
- Write theatres in support or condemnation of their gender equity efforts
- Create awards for theatre companies that meet equity targets
- Curate a list of plays by women and other equity-seeking groups and make it publicly available online
- Ally with men to advocate for gender equity; men can refuse to participate in theatres that don't program women in their seasons