



**PUSH
COMMUNITY
CONVERSATION**

PuSh
INTERNATIONAL
PERFORMING ARTS
FESTIVAL

ON DECEMBER 7, 2020, PUSH HOSTED A COMMUNITY conversation with 33 participants, facilitated by Maiko Yamamoto, Marcus Youssef, and Dani Fecko. Of the 33 participants, 15 were artists or arts workers, six represented service organizations such as arts councils and funders, five were former PuSh board members, three identified as patrons or donors, three were former PuSh staff, and one identified as a PuSh volunteer. All participants delivered a one-minute prepared response to the question: “What, knowing only what you know and from your subjective point of view, is advice you have for the Festival as it restructures?” This report, prepared by an external observer, endeavours to summarize the responses and highlight consistent themes and sentiments.

The most prominent sentiment expressed was the community’s recommendation to slow down and cancel the 2021 PuSh Festival. There is a need to heal and for PuSh to resist the urgency and desire to move through this moment quickly as it will get in the way of repairing relationships and building trust. PuSh must take ownership of past mistakes and repair the relationship with former staff members to rebuild trust with the community who support them. Participants insisted that PuSh use 2021 as a place for deep listening, gathering, really connecting, continuing the dialogue with the community, and recalibrating to come back stronger. In this recovery process, the narrative needs to be really clear around who is making decisions, what the process is, and what PuSh’s values are. There needs to be a face to the festival to communicate with the public and provide more information about what is happening. To exemplify this need for transparency, a long time patron and participant was asked about her impression of the festival at this time. She said that she and her husband were “completely lost, all of a sudden things were gone.”

As PuSh moves forward, there is a call for clarity around the values, process, and purpose of PuSh.

As PuSh moves forward, there is a call for clarity around the values, process, and purpose of PuSh. PuSh grew out of a need that folks identified at the time, and now it must adapt to fulfill the community’s new needs. A major theme in the advice given was an insistence on leaning into the Vancouver community to make the festival strong again. The people of Vancouver are PuSh’s key stakeholders, and PuSh must listen to focus groups and diversify its point of view. PuSh was started by more than one artistic director and is a massive part of Vancouver’s artistic ecosystem, and therefore its continuation is a priority. There was a desire for the community to track PuSh’s JEDI practices and hold them accountable.

Governance and organizational structures were integral to the advice given for PuSh to move forward in a reparative and healthy way. The board governance model was identified as a major issue that requires review and unpacking of colonial, white supremacist, and capitalist structures that can manifest within it and the organization. This process is key for PuSh to re-engineer what it becomes next to meet the community’s new needs and be a frontrunner for an alternate organizational structure. A frequent call for a different model included equitable and collaborative practices and non-hierarchical relationships to create a model that continues to be a leader in the field and ensures a safe and healthy workplace for all individuals. To achieve this, the board needs to be available and trained in diversity and equity policies and practices and basic conflict resolution to be better equipped to resolve disagreements and tensions as they arise, with a commitment to care. While the board needs new and more diverse voices, they need to make room for the voices that have been silenced. The board needs to establish procedures to hold leadership to account and

empower the staff who understand operations. While this sentiment was evident, it was also mentioned that the previous system and culture included a strong relationship between the board and staff and a shared sense of purpose and communication.

The role of leadership was central to a revisioned organizational structure and programming. There was a call to determine leadership positions that are not based on colonial foundations, to think about models that invite different perspectives, have strong collaborative processes based on dialogue, consider co-leadership to better serve the diverse communities that the festival engages, and to look local for leadership. To do this, participants suggested exploring a different model for recruitment, learning from Indigenous leadership, maintaining focus groups as part of the next stage of the festival and leadership, and providing substantial compensation to BIPOC leadership with supportive structures to set them up for success and agency to enact radical decisions and change.

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Discussions on programming and curation centred around diversity, inclusion, equity, and accessibility. The festival was analyzed as once aesthetically driven, while now the world and sector have become more social justice driven. PuSh's programming should meet the world as it is now, through a diversity and equity lens. There was concern about the art and curation elitism and that the festival must be more accessible for LGBTQAI2S+, BIPOC, emerging artists, and audiences. The festival must centre artists and artist care at its core.

As a vision forward, participants emphasized the need to consider PuSh's responsibility to other organizations it collaborates with and its responsibility to heal. Trust has been broken and needs to be rebuilt first. The strength of PuSh was its rare collaboration with different organizations, international profile, bringing together different ideas and artists, and helping other arts organizations reach the public, tour, and create new works.



COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS (33)

Artists/Arts Workers **15**

Organization/Council **6**

Past Board Members **5**

Donor/Patron **3**

Past Staff **3**

Volunteer **1**

It was mentioned that there were many white faces in the room, and, given the importance of diversity and justice, outreach is needed to reach those who may have intentionally stepped back but whose voices are needed.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Slow down
- Cancel 2021 Festival
- Healing is needed
- The Festival is important to the community
- Listen to the Vancouver community
- A new organizational model is needed
- Consider co-leadership and co-curation
- Look local for leadership
- Clarify values and purpose
- Be more transparent and communicative with the public
- A diversity of voices is needed

IN THIS MOMENT

- Healing is needed.
- Resist the urgency and desire to move through this quickly and get in the way of repairing relationships and building trust.
- There is an immediate need to build trust.
- Engage in relationship repair.
- Repair the relationship with former staff to help build trust with the community who support them.
- Focus on building back the staff, board, and organization.
- Listen to those who you ask for input and those who have the most to gain.
- Take ownership of past mistakes.
- Don't play politics — play justice accountability.
- Cancel 2021 Festival; it's okay to be quiet right now.
- Use 2021 as a place of deep listening, gathering, really connecting, and continue the dialogue.
- Take the time and space to recalibrate and come back stronger.
- Sacrifice perceived safety to create conditions for transparency and accountability.
- In this recovery process, the narrative needs to be really clear.
- Be transparent about who is making decisions, what the process is, and about PuSh's values.
- A face to the festival is needed to give more information about what's happening.
- A longtime patron was asked about her impression of the festival at this time, and she said she and her husband are "completely lost, all of the sudden things were gone."
- Don't tear down the Festival. Keep it alive.



PURPOSE

- There is a call for clarity around the values, process, and purpose of PuSh.
- PuSh must be clear on what kind of organization it is.
- PuSh came out of a need that folks saw at the time. What are the new needs that the community has? PuSh needs to fulfill that need.
- The strength of PuSh was its unique collaboration with different organizations.
- PuSh brings together different ideas and artists.
- Being an international festival is key.
- The festival is more than an Artistic Director or industry series. The festival is a massive part of the city's livelihood, and its continuation is a priority.
- PuSh is a crucial organization for Vancouver, and it needs to thrive.
- The festival is inspiring and unique but also vital to the Vancouver ecosystem.
- PuSh helped other arts organizations reach the public, tour, and create new works.



COMMUNITY

- We need to work together as a community to support women of colour and recognize that we are not doing a good job at it.
- Have a community scorecard (JEDI) for PuSh to track and keep accountability.
- What do we as a sector think is important?
- PuSh must focus on thinking about the local community.
- Being a Vancouver organization has been one of PuSh's strengths, and the community will make it strong.
- PuSh should listen to focus groups.
- The people of Vancouver are PuSh's key stakeholders.
- Few people know PuSh, so it needs to increase awareness to increase patronage.
- PuSh needs to diversify its point of view and the spaces it shows up in.
- It's important to return to the Festival's local roots and its local partnership and collaboration ethos.
- PuSh needs to build community by bringing people from different parts of society together.

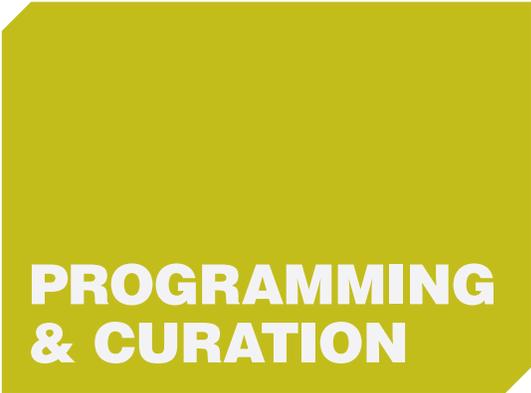
PROCESS & STRUCTURE

- The board governance model is the most important issue, and there needs to be a strong commitment by PuSh to review it.
- Take apart how white supremacy and capitalism manifests within the organization and re-engineer what it can become next to meet the community's new needs.
- White supremacy and patriarchy act through individuals as well as the organization.
- The decolonization of board governance structure needs to be addressed.
- Decolonization can be achieved through Indigenous councils and knowledge keepers.
- PuSh needs to have a fluid structure and be open to change constantly — not just in a crisis.
- There needs to be a different model with collaborative, non-hierarchical relationships.
- PuSh can be a frontrunner for new models to break the vertical organizational model and move into horizontal models.
- Start from the most equitable set of values drawn from collaborative sets of practices and reverse engineer a model that continues to be a leader in the field.
- Everyone in the organization matters.
- The most important thing is respect and care for all individuals involved.
- Create governance and organizational structures that ensure a safe and healthy workplace for all staff.
- The organization needs to work within its financial and operational capacity.
- Make ticketing system more accessible through the online space.
- The board needs to establish procedures to hold leadership accountable.
- The board needs new and more diverse voices.
- Make room for the voices that have been silenced.
- Empower the staff who understand operations and get out of their way.
- Board needs to be available and trained in diversity and equity policies and practices.
- Board needs to be trained on conflict resolution and resolve conflicts as they arise.
- Provide people with basic skills in conflict resolution to be comfortable in minor situations to deal with bigger issues.
- There can be disagreement if there is a commitment to care.
- PuSh needs to invest in progressive advice and avoid advice from people who don't understand the sector.
- It's important to reference a previous system and culture that existed for a long time, including a strong relationship between the board and staff.
- Staff and board used to have a shared sense of purpose and communication.
- Hoping PuSh will reinvent a way out of the siloed theatre and into working across disciplines.



LEADERSHIP

- Needs clarity of purpose and a leader who knows how to lead.
- Maintain focus groups as part of the next stage of the festival and leadership.
- Learn from Indigenous leadership.
- Figure out another leadership position that is not based on colonial foundations.
- Think about what other models might bring different perspectives.
- Think about a different model for recruitment than the usual looking for a single visionary.
- Provide substantial compensation to BIPOC leadership with support underneath to set them up for success and the agency/autonomy to enact radical decisions and change.
- Consider the co-leadership model, especially considering the diversity of the communities that the festival is serving and leading.
- New leadership should come locally.
- It needs a strong collaborative process that is based on dialogue.
- Arts and artist-driven.



PROGRAMMING & CURATION

- Identify the core artistic needs.
- Festival used to be more aesthetically driven, and now the world has shifted, and we are social justice driven.
- Concerns about the elitism of the art and curation.
- The work on the stage has been value-driven, and somehow we have to rediscover it with a diversity and equity lens.
- The Youth Academy is a big resource for young artists and should expand to emphasize LGBTQAI2S+ and BIPOC members.
- Make the festival more accessible for LGBTQAI2S+ and BIPOC people and young artists.
- Explore ways to make the festival more accessible for audiences and emerging artists.
- Put forward inclusion models.
- Support artists more through commissioning.
- Centering artists need to be at the Festival's core.
- Music has been by and large marginalized to the cabaret or the late night.



- Consider the responsibility to other organizations PuSh collaborates with and its responsibility to heal.
- Conversations where people can be unafraid to take risks. These conversations require trust, and trust has been broken and needs to be rebuilt first.

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