

Toronto Fringe Opens Digital Lottery Applications, Reserving 50% of Festival Slots for Artists who are Black, Indigenous, or Persons of Colour

The festival takes this step to address imbalances that exist on Fringe stages, live and digital.

March 8, 2021 (Toronto, ON) After considering an outdoor festival for Summer 2021, the Toronto Fringe [recently announced](#) it is moving forward with a digital festival to do its part to stop the spread of COVID-19. Now called **The Digital Toronto Fringe Festival**, companies will present pre-recorded video, audio, and written pieces for audiences to enjoy as part the Fringe On-Demand series. An additional Fringe Primetime series will offer audiences a chance to experience the thrill of a live and interactive Fringe show online. The dates of the festival are July 21 – 31, 2021.

Today, Digital Lottery applications open for the 2021 Digital Toronto Fringe Festival. Applications will be accepted in two categories this year: Main Digital Lottery and KidsFest Digital Lottery. Companies that are selected in either Digital Lottery will be offered a slot in the On-Demand series. The winners will be selected by random draw during a Lottery Livestream on Facebook Live, at noon on March 31, 2021. (Fringe Primetime series slots will be filled later in the spring. Stay tuned for details.)

Every year, Toronto Fringe holds a lottery to program the festival by selecting shows at random in a draw. This year is no different, except those selected in the Digital Lottery will be offered a digital presentation page on [fringetoronto.com](#) instead of a live theatre venue. The festival will fulfill all other obligations to its artists that it would in a normal year, such as providing guidance and resources, a front of house and box office team, comprehensive marketing and promotions for their shows, and a platform on which to connect with audiences. In a normal year, that platform is a stage, a park, or a site-specific location. This year, that platform will be a robust and accessible digital presentation page on [fringetoronto.com](#).

50% of Slots Held for BIPOC Artists

For the 2021 Digital Fringe, the festival has committed to reserving at least 50% of available Fringe On-Demand slots for artists who are Black, Indigenous, or Persons of Colour. A two-phase lottery draw will be used to achieve this goal.

What is a Two-Phase Lottery Draw?

The two-phase lottery draw is a lottery in which artists who are Black, Indigenous, or Persons of Colour will be drawn first. (Further details below.) It is being piloted as a measure to strengthen equity, diversity and inclusion at the festival.

In late 2020 The Toronto Fringe underwent an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Audit conducted by Where You Are Consulting. In light of their preliminary recommendations, we are implementing a two-phase lottery structure as a step to directly address imbalances that exist in the demographics reflected on Fringe stages, live or digital. The full EDI Audit will be published later in March. For now, you may refer to [this EDI page on our website](#) for excerpts and a video recording of our EDI Town Hall.

The Toronto Fringe acknowledges that the history of the Fringe movement is rooted in a Canadian arts ecology that was built on whiteness and systemically prioritized white voices and audiences. To continue to live up to our core values and founding belief that every voice has an equal right to be heard, we must actively disarm conventionally accepted oppressive practices, and counteract systems of white supremacy that impact our sector.

How Does a Two-Phase Lottery Work?

There will be two phases of drawing for each Digital Lottery (Main Digital Lottery and KidsFest Digital Lottery):

PHASE ONE: Applicants who identify as Black, Indigenous, or Persons of Colour will be entered into the draw exclusively for the first 50% of all digital slots in the category.

PHASE TWO: Once at least 50% of total digital slots are filled by BIPOC applicants, or if no more BIPOC applicants remain to draw from (whichever comes first), the remaining slots will be drawn from all applicants in the category.

In making this change, Fringe recognizes that artists may have questions or concerns. Those interested in reading the Fringe's full Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion report, titled "Fringe in Full Colour," [may download a copy here later in March when it is published](#). Or those wishing to discuss further may contact Executive Director, Lucy Eveleigh, at exec@fringetoronto.com.

Isn't Fringe an Equal Playing Field?

In some ways, Fringe is the most equal way to produce theatre. There are no gatekeepers, curators, or jury members. There is no way to privilege one voice over another, because the festival is "curated" by chance – by a bunch of numbers being drawn in a lottery. However, what the festival has seen year after year is a majority of white artists on its stages, while other organizations and events with curation-based models, including the Next Stage Theatre Festival, have been able to actively diversify their stages through proactive programming mandates. In a recent data analysis, Toronto Fringe found that only 22% of its Fringe Festival lottery applications identified as BIPOC.

Fringe has taken steps to address this over the years, such as implementing the Culturally Diverse Artist Project (CDAP), which has led to a slight increase in BIPOC representation at the festival. Yet the demographic breakdown of the festival **still has not shifted enough to properly reflect the diversity of this city and the core values of the organization**. Which is why the staff and board of the Toronto Fringe have taken this step towards creating more space for equity-seeking groups, to set a quota of spots in the Digital Lottery that must be filled with artists who are Black, Indigenous, or Persons of Colour.

From Executive Director, Lucy Eveleigh: "We find ourselves in a time of reckoning and we have the opportunity to try out ways to diversify our festival. We want our community to know that we are serious about making a difference and it's no longer enough to say: *"If you build it, they will come."* We want to be more pro-active and this two-phase lottery is an attempt to do that. We do not know how we will rebuild after COVID-19, when we can gather again, but we do know that reimagining our organization will require more detailed attention and focus on those who have been left behind."

From Chair of the Toronto Fringe Board of Directors, Jason Murray: "The world has always made progress when it has been willing to look at things differently, to do things differently, to try things differently. Fringe will always be an organization looking to bend, to reshape, to reform—an organization that wants everyone to come out and play and have their stories told. Join us as we continue to colour outside of the lines."

From EDI Consultants, Sedina Fiati and Candice Frederick (Where You Are Consulting): "We are excited to see The Toronto Fringe take this bold step toward radical inclusivity as they engage in a reckoning process to look at access from an intersectional and multifaceted lens. It has been a fertile journey to work with this team, and we've observed a clear dedication and a collaborative spirit as they work toward addressing oppression within their

organization. We look forward to releasing the final report from our EDI audit and to seeing how the Toronto Fringe will continue to transform, infusing social justice principles into every aspect of their work.”

Application Information

Eligibility:

Since this is a digital festival and no travel is required, applicants from around the world may apply.

Dates:

Applications are open now and close at 11:59pm on Wednesday, March 24, 2021.

Fees:

The application fee is Pay What You Can (PWYC). This year the typical application fee of \$29 is being waived. Artists may select a PWYC donation, if possible. For those who are drawn, the participation fee has been lowered from \$760 to \$200 CAD.

Accommodations:

If a company requires any accessibility accommodations in order to submit an application to the Digital Lottery, please contact Suzanne Wilkie, at intern@fringetoronto.com or 416-966-1062 ext. 221.

Apply Now:

Visit [this web page](#) for all application information.

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