OUTSIDE THE MARCH

2023-2028 STRATEGIC PLAN



No Save Points (2023)
Photo by Dahlia Katz

WELCOME TO OUTSIDE THE MARCH'S 2023-2028 STRATEGIC PLAN

The plan is the result of over two years of dreaming, analysis and self-reflection on the part of our staff, associate artists, Board and community. We've acknowledged these individuals below; this plan is theirs as much as it is ours, and we're grateful for their rich contributions and collaboration.

We believe this planning process has been ambitious, rigorous, and inevitably imperfect. It included internal and external consultation alongside other strategic activities including our participation in Metcalf's Staging Change program and our internal anti-racism processes. We were greatly aided by responses to a publicly circulated community feedback survey, completed by over 150 OtM audience members and community members.

Above all our aim with this plan is to more perfectly embody our newly re-articulated core values, which you'll find below. Developed in collaboration with our facilitator Michelle Yagi—to whom we owe many thanks— this approach to planning marks something of a departure from traditional strategic plans and is designed to balance rigour and elasticity. Instead of solely measuring the plan against unbending metrics (key performance indicators, growth, etc.), it holds the company's values as the lens through which all future activity is held accountable. While it includes metrics for success, this plan is designed to leave room for responsiveness. We believe this approach is particularly suited to the company's care-centred ethos and the unpredictable realities of our current moment.

Our values represent the sensibilities that have always propelled our work and will continue to in the future. We've organized the plan's 10 goals according to their most dominant corresponding value, though we believe that the strength of these goals is how they each bring many of our core values into harmony. Some of those goals are radical and new; some are commitments to build on what we're already doing; together they represent the most cohesive vision we have for our company culture and identity.

We believe the goals contained in this plan are thrilling. We hope you will too.

Mitchell Cushman
Artistic Director

Katherine Devlin Rosenfeld
Managing Producer

February 2024

OtM CORE VALUES

IMMERSION

We create epic and intimate worlds tailored to the unique needs of each project. We engage with every facet of a production as a chance to deepen the storytelling experience—from the first interaction with a marketing campaign to the ride home from the show, and everything in between.

CURIOSITY

We are on the hunt for the hidden theatrical potential in the world around us. We are open and adaptive as we seek new ways to tell stories together.

CARE

Our approach to hospitality celebrates that every artist, every staff member and every audience member has different needs and desires. We strive to be compassionate and empathetic, building a safer, more accessible, and more equitable space for everyone who interacts with the company.

CONNECTION

We consciously forge relationships between artists, audiences, our neighbours in Toronto, and the land on which we share stories.

THRILLS

We relish the unknown, embracing joy and risk in our processes and surprise in our artistic offerings.

INTRODUCTION

Since 2009 we've created unforgettable immersive encounters, working to redefine the experience of theatre for new generations of audiences. We've become a local, national and even international instigator in our sector. Since the release of our last Strategic Plan (2018-2020) we've grown significantly, and we now have a larger staff than ever delivering an impressive array of high-calibre programming, from major immersive productions to new work development to artist training and more. Our productions range from epic to intimate; from immersive interpretations of established scripts to world premieres of new work; from site-engaged experiences in found venues to productions staged in traditional theatres that turn those spaces on their heads. Over and above the goals contained in this plan, we will continue delivering these exceptional immersive offerings.

CHALLENGES

As the scope of our artistic ambitions has grown, it's become exponentially more expensive to mount our large-scale immersive productions in non-equipped found spaces. In recent years, that's led us to stage our work within traditional theatre spaces with greater frequency than is ideal for our site-specific ethos. Moreover, the impact of the pandemic over the past few years has radically changed audience attendance habits and further revealed the precarity at the foundation of our industry, where lack of resources regularly leads to shortcuts that negatively impact workers, artists, equity and the environment.

VALUES-DRIVEN GOALS TO MEET THOSE CHALLENGES

Forged out of our work articulating both our values and our vision for the future of the company, our plan will see us: acquire the next-level tools and technologies to properly equip our artists; better care for and compensate our staff and artists; deepen audience engagement; and increase capacity across our industry.

INCREASED FINANCIAL CAPACITY TO DELIVER THOSE GOALS

Achieving these transformative goals will require a major, concerted, creative approach to diversifying our funding sources. Accordingly, we are focused on bolstering our value-driven goals by significantly growing the organization's renewable financial capacity. As will be further outlined in a detailed financial plan, over the next five years, we will:

Pursue a transformative major gifts campaign through dedicated fundraising efforts across foundations, grants and individual giving to support a one-time capacity-building initiative focused on the company's site-specific mandate. Bolster our Creative Trust donorship program and grow our community of small- and mid-level donors.

Develop a revenue-generating program offering immersive experiences and workshops to corporate clients, seeded with support from The Trillium Foundation.

Hire a Director of Development to optimize our fundraising strategy and investigate underexplored fundraising opportunities for the company.

IMMERSION

GOAL 1

We will re-prioritize our work animating found spaces across the GTA, doubling down on our roots as an artistic organization passionate about site-specific work.

CONTEXT

We've been forced to stray from our site-engaged roots as a result of financial and logistical imperatives. Our history of partnerships and collaborations is a fundamental strength of the organization, but we've increasingly relied on infrastructure and personnel at established venues in a relatively small geographical area of downtown Toronto. We're spending significant resources each year on single-use rentals—equipment that often isn't purpose-built to create temporary theatre spaces in unique locations.

To solve this challenge we need to change the current structure of financial incentives and limitations that exist within the organization that pull us away from pursuing site-specific engagement. With this in mind, we will embark on a transformative fundraising campaign that ensures that our artists have the freedom to make uncompromised, ambitious, bold artistic choices on every project. This campaign will allow us to: 1) be more fearless in mounting our work across the entire GTA, making live performance in unexpected places a vibrant and visible part of post-pandemic life in our city; 2) become a more robust resource centre that can invite other theatre artists and organizations to play in our sandbox with us; 3) supercharge our support for emerging immersive practitioners whose work excites us.

STRATEGY

YEARS 1-2

- Consult with our community. We're increasingly part of a growing network of site-engaged artists in Toronto and we want to ensure that our company's success is inexorably linked to our broader sector. We aim to reexamine how space, equipment, training, labour and other resources are deployed sustainably at our company and across the industry.

- Complete a Feasibility Study with support from Canadian Heritage to gather data, evaluate new business models and complete a community impact assessment to understand needs.

YEARS 3-4

- Establish a major gifts campaign "Cabinet" of core project ambassadors to assist with fundraising and consult on the project's implementation.

- Launch the project's major gifts campaign campaign.

YEARS 4-5

- Pilot new revenue-generating models.

- Pilot radically generous sharing models with the community.

CURIOSITY

GOAL 2

We will create more time and space for our artists and staff to dream, explore and play.

CONTEXT

We value play within process and dedicated time for creative experimentation, both for our art and our operations.

STRATEGY

YEARS 1-5

• Create and implement a longer workshop phase for all of our new works in development to allow them the necessary time and space to grow. With the support of the Metcalf Staging Change program, we're scaling up a new model of immersive development called the "Cardboard Phase." Tracing its roots to the creation of literal cardboard models during the development of 2019's The Tape Escape, this replicable workshop model formalizes OtM's signature approach to creation, allowing our artists the freedom and time to develop custom, tangible models of their immersive concepts. Doing this at an early stage of development will give creative and operational team members the knowledge they need to execute artistic and production timelines better, bolstering our capacity and better serving our increasingly wide circle of artists.

• Continue to refine an extended preview structure for our productions. We've learned over our history that the participatory nature of immersive performance often necessitates audience testing more akin to the "beta testing" model of game making. So over the past two years, we've implemented a preview structure that includes full days of rehearsal in between each preview, allowing for a responsive, generative process. We'll continue to hone our preview structures and share what we learn with our community.

• Dedicate a week every year to both a company creative retreat and a company operations retreat to allow for "blue sky" exploration of new ideas and purposeful decision-making.

CARE

GOAL 3

We will see every opportunity to expand our team and every decision we make as chances to further put our anti-racist and anti-oppressive values into practice.

CONTEXT

We value sustained, continual growth in anti-racism and anti-oppression. We recognize that diverse, intersectional teams are integral to that growth and that as a historically predominantly white, CIS, able-bodied organization, we understand that bringing new voices to the table means concerted relationship-building over the long term.

STRATEGY

YEARS 1-5

• Actively hire equity-seeking artists and team members until they make up at least half of the company's creative and production teams, company staff, and Board of Directors. This includes: starting early in developing relationships with equity-seeking artists to better understand the challenges or barriers that might be preventing them from applying to work with the company; expanding beyond traditional hiring platforms; significantly extending the usual time allocated for job postings and interview processes to allow for community outreach and recommendations.

• Add equity as an agenda item for discussion as part of all decision-making meetings. Build in time to make sure these areas of focus are addressed and discussed as part of every decision-making process.

• Engage in consultation and training led by equity-seeking artists, acknowledging the need to further incorporate equity-seeking voices when determining company initiatives around anti-racism and accessibility.

GOAL 4

We will evolve our art-making and operations models to center considerations around access at earlier stages of planning—prioritizing building strong and ongoing relationships with members of access-seeking communities.

CONTEXT

Our last Strategic Plan pushed us to increase access across the organization. As we've deepened relationships with intersecting, access-seeking communities, it's clear that the most effective accessibility is built beginning in the earliest stages of production development and includes deep collaboration with/between voices with lived experience, including as lead creators. On 2022's Trojan Girls, for example, we engaged a pilot Access Committee of professionals from across disability spectrums to advise on relationship-building with the d/Deaf community and physical accessibility.

STRATEGY

YEARS 2-5

- Engage a committee of access consultants made up of members from disability communities on every production, building on our pilot Trojan Girls Access Committee. This will lead to the creation of a year-round, standing company Access Committee by Year 4.

- Provide resources and time for our creators to engage with the critical intersection of accessibility and dramaturgy from an early stage of development.



***Trojan Girls* (2022)**
Photo by Dahlia Katz

GOAL 5

We will continue to strengthen our care-centred company culture and bolster our HR policies accordingly.

CONTEXT

We value sustained, continual growth in accessible and anti-racist working practices as an integral part of the company's growth. We value the diverse curiosities and passions of our staff and resident artists and are passionate about building sustainable working conditions and fair compensation rates.

STRATEGY - FINANCIAL

YEARS 1-5

• Offer our employees health and dental benefits and continue to provide an allowance for a health and care accommodations spending account (currently conceived of as the BOOST support program, which allows OtM employees and contractors access to additional funds during times of need).

• We will continue to increase fees for team members and artists in line with the annual increase in living wage standards (note: living wage, not minimum wage).

YEARS 3-5

• Establish and maintain an annual accessibility fund for staff and contract employees. This fund will be used to help overcome barriers like neurodivergent working needs, mental health supports, financial supports for work tools (a work computer, for example) and transportation.

STRATEGY - POLICY

YEARS 1-5

• We will regularly review and rearticulate our org chart and staff job descriptions to ensure that our team is well-tuned and that staff members' interests and curiosities align with their work.

• Revise and renew our HR policies on an annual basis. This will include building on our robust Code of Conduct and reporting process; our COVID-19 safety policy; our care-centred culture statement created as a pilot organization in the national Balancing Act caregiving initiative; and others.

YEARS 2-5

• Build an annual community agreement with the staff team to better understand everyone's unique communication preferences, access needs and tools they need to thrive in a working environment.

• Create a community agreement at the beginning of each rehearsal process.

GOAL 6

We will only move forward with new projects if they take into account our team's well-being. We will aim towards a model where staff are consistently operating at 80% capacity, leaving room to respond to new challenges and unexpected events with the remaining 20%.

CONTEXT

We value the health and mental well-being of our staff team and acknowledge that the company's sustainable growth is closely tied to the available, limited capacity of the team.

STRATEGY

YEAR 1

• We will conduct an overtime audit with all the company's team members to track and monitor how and where time is being spent and investigate alternative working models and employee contracts.

YEAR 2

• Pilot formalizing the company's programming calendar to reflect two "production" slots each year on predictable timeframes, aiding in our ability to better forecast and budget for staff capacity.

YEARS 1-5

• Hold quarterly capacity review meetings to clarify priorities, review capacity and empower our staff members to question if the pace of programming matches their current available capacity.
• Company leadership will budget for time and capacity in our project budgets and our season planning.



Jerusalem (2018)
Photo by Dahlia Katz

CONNECTION

GOAL 7

We will continue to develop long-term relationships with Indigenous artists, audiences and consultants.

CONTEXT

We value our responsibility as site-specific and immersive theatre makers to be thoughtful about our connection to the land. We value meaningful engagement with our company's complicity in colonial systems of injustice. Through the following strategies—as well as our hiring practices, calls for submissions, apprenticeships and other opportunities—we are committed to becoming an organization with the resources, relationships, knowledge and infrastructure to be an electric support hub for Indigenous artists interested in immersive theatre creation.

STRATEGY

YEAR 1

• Use specifically earmarked funds from our CCA Digital Now grant to facilitate a case study conversation with Indigenous artists on how remote/immersive work can better engage with decolonial practices.

YEARS 2-5

• Engage in professional development specifically geared to the company's relationship with the land and reconciliation.

• Create project-specific engagement with Indigenous artists and audiences on each of our major immersive productions. This may take the form of (but isn't limited to) consultation with Indigenous Elders, partnerships with local Indigenous-led organizations and businesses, etc.

GOAL 8

We will reflect the urgency of the Climate Disaster in our art and operations.

CONTEXT

We value our responsibility as site-specific and immersive theatre makers to be thoughtful about our connection to the land.

STRATEGY

YEARS 1-5

• We will work towards meeting three sustainability goals each year as outlined in the CGA (Canadian Green Alliance) handbook: one each relating to operations, artistic productions and touring. We will balance ambition and achievability, prioritizing goals that maximize impact while being realistic about added labour for staff and contracted team members.

• We will additionally consider the Climate Emergency as a vital subject matter as we make artistic season planning and curatorial decisions.

YEARS 4-5

• Enshrine sustainability as a key priority informing our site-specific venue selections (Goal 1), evolving our work practices to be significantly less reliant on short-term acquisition of disposable infrastructure.



The Tape Escape (2019)
Photo by Neil Silcox

GOAL 9

We will continue to develop Outside the March's national and international presence.

CONTEXT

We value opportunities for national, international and cross-cultural dialogue and learning. Touring site-engaged, immersive work is inherently challenging. But thanks to innovative partnerships—and boosted by the reach of our remote, pandemic-related projects—we're increasingly finding ways to collaborate with new artists and share our work beyond the GTA. These opportunities allow us to learn and stretch, and to more sustainably support our creators' works from development to post-premiere life.

STRATEGY

YEAR 2-5

• We will seek out further opportunities to present and develop work nationally and internationally, using upcoming presentations at the La Jolla WOW festival in San Diego and the Dublin Theatre Festival to connect with presenters and producers around the world.

YEARS 4-5

• We will seek out travel and exchange opportunities beyond production presentations to create learning and sharing opportunities nationally and internationally. We will place a specific emphasis on travel to conferences and events for the immersive subsector as a reflection of our unique space in Canada's arts ecology.

THRILLS

GOAL 10

We will continue to harness the unique artistic and producing possibilities of immersive creation.

CONTEXT

We value risk as an important artistic tool. We take nothing as given, aiming to do for our theatre creators what prestige television did for screen-based storytelling: radically expand the canvas on which storytelling takes place.

Tinkering with when, how and where projects encounter audiences has allowed us to unlock possibilities for creating deeper audience experiences. Our previous Strategic Plan, for example, had as its goal to create a long-running immersive production. The Tape Escape, The Ministry of Mundane Mysteries and several of our recent digital offerings have been exciting experiments with this: immersive productions running far longer than a traditional show.

We aim to double down, further leveraging immersive theatre's possibilities by tailoring storytelling, access, length of run and medium of dissemination—and more—on every project. Continuing to formalize a programming cycle of two experiences per season (one an original new work) will allow us to innovate across our portfolio of artistic offerings as we balance epic and intimate, scripted and devised, established plays and new work.

STRATEGY

YEARS 1-5

• We will involve multiple perspectives in our Cardboard Workshops, including staff, designers, technicians and artists, considering every facet of a project's storytelling possibilities.

YEAR 2

• We will review learnings from TommorrowLoveTM, Tape Escape and Mundane Mysteries and consider a new OtM-created project that could have a transformative impact on our audiences and sector.

YEARS 2-5

• We will consider purposeful digital offerings for all our experiences. These explorations will include participation and/or consultation with artists from disability communities to consider how these offerings can help OtM's work reach a wider array of audiences.

YEARS 4-5

• Hire a designated "Audience Concierge" on every production. This hybrid position blending accessibility, box office, outreach and communications will allow us to better cater to the needs of all our audience members, building on experiments with the position on past productions, notably The Ministry of Mundane Mysteries.

ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESS

In pursuing this integral and ambitious set of goals for the next five years, we recognize that we will need to adopt a philosophy of flexibility and dynamism; if the pandemic years have taught us anything, it's that the road ahead never looks exactly like what we think it will. Since the shape of the work outlined in this plan will inevitably evolve from our current understanding of them, we must have a genuine and rigorous process of accountability, to keep us moored to the deep values-led commitments that underpin these goals.

With this in mind, OtM will adopt several new practices to keep the organization on track. At the beginning of each new project or endeavour, we will hold a "pre-mortem" with the entire team involved in that undertaking (artistic and operational), in which we will review the company's five core values and the spirit that underpins them. This is designed to create a shared vocabulary for any team members to productively address if they feel like the work is steering away from these values, and bring things back on track. In addition, we will use the plan's goals as a framework for our reporting at our bi-monthly board meetings, to keep the work top-of-mind year-round.

OtM will also be forming a "Planning Advisory Council" - made up of members of the company's current Artistic Council and the External Facilitation team who consulted on the creation of this plan. Beginning in November 2023, OtM will hire the members of this council to meet with representatives from the company's staff and board for an annual, day-long Strategic Plan "Pulse Check". During this time, the group will go through each of the goals outlined in this plan, review progress and any stumbling blocks, and talk through actionable next steps for the year ahead. Should any of the specific goals and/or the strategies we undertake to pursue them need to change, we will rely on this council to help us make these decisions, guided by the bedrock values which have been newly articulated during this process. The findings from this annual review, as well as the company's work and progress from the year, will then be consolidated into a publicly released annual report each winter (the first time Outside the March has engaged in such a process).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the tireless, generous, sage efforts of our Strategic Plan Coordinator **Michelle Yagi**, as well as the members of our Strategic Planning Committee which have included Board Chair **Madeleine Cohen**, Board Members **Jarel Cockburn** and **Josée Rhault**, and company members **Mitchell Cushman**, **Katherine Devin Rosenfeld**, **Griffin McInnes**, **Laura McCallum**, **Sébastien Heins**, **Jeff Ho** and **Nick Blais**.

We would also like to acknowledge the invaluable support and wisdom contributed by the external facilitators and reviewers brought into this process, including **Clayton Baraniuk**, **Kristin Ferguson**, **Devon Healey**, **Natércia Napoleão**, **Emma Stenning** and **Lori Willcox**.

We would also like to acknowledge the additional support of **Sue Balint** and the Metcalf Foundation Staging Change Program. In addition to OtM's core staff, our Staging Change innovation team included **Robert Binet**, **Katherine Cullen**, **Thurga Kanagasekarampillai**, **Amy Keating**, **Annie Luján**, **Janice Peters Gibson**, **Anand Rajaram** and **Merlin Simard**.

Outside the March is grateful to be based in Tkaronto—the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabe, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples, and covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit.