

ONTARIO
PRESENTS

Slow Touring

Exploring transformative alternatives for the touring sector in Ontario

Ontario Presents
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IPAA
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Introduction

In 2022, Ontario Presents commissioned three reports on Slow Touring. We asked the researchers to consult with the artistic community, seeking to learn about current barriers and opportunities, and develop recommendations for transformative touring models. This project took place with support from the Canada Council for the Arts, and in partnership with IPAA (Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance) and SPARC (Supporting Performing Arts in Rural and Remote Communities).

What is Slow Touring?

Slow Touring takes inspiration from the wider Slow Movement (such as Slow Food and Slow Tourism) and represents a fundamental shift to the touring sector, seeking to increase the engagement between visiting artists and the local community, increase artists' capacity to take creative risks, improve artists' wellbeing and financial stability, and reduce the climate impact of touring.

Slow Touring is not a new innovation: engagement activities like commissioning are common in the artistic community, and an empathetic, care-based approach to hosting touring artists is something that many communities (particularly IBPOC) have taken for a long time. This project is intended to find out how those approaches can be adopted to fundamentally transform the mainstream touring and presenting sector.

Our Process

To begin the research process, we identified three key areas for exploration and consultation, and engaged a different consultant to research each one. These areas were:

Community Engagement on Tour - Fanny Martin (Art of Festivals)

Commissioning & Residencies - Franco Boni

Indigenous Approaches to Touring - Brit Johnston

Each of the experts consulted with members of the artistic community, focusing on the experiences of touring and presenting, and prepared a report featuring reflections and recommendations. These three reports are compiled below.

Selected Themes

This is not a complete summary of the three reports, but a selection of the themes that we observed.

1. Climate and Sustainability

Many artists and arts workers are interested in reducing the climate impact of our sector, but the burden of making changes often falls to under-resourced independent artists, and climate initiatives tend to be simplistic rather than addressing the wider implications of sustainability.

“The question of sustainability is no doubt crucial to the performing arts sector, but cannot be reduced to a simple change of transportation, which has little relevance outside the dense historical rail networks of mainland Europe.”

Artists, especially Indigenous artists, often “don’t have the option to think about an environmental impact.”

2. Collaborating with Indigenous Artists

The mainstream presenting sector as a whole still significantly lacks cultural competency when working with Indigenous artists. Presenters should consider: supporting Indigenous artists in finding connection with the local community; creating safe space and time for cultural protocols like smudging; and ensuring that front-line staff are meaningfully trained in equity, inclusivity and cultural awareness.

“Many presenters lack the cultural competency required for building good relations with Indigenous artists, including knowing which territory they occupy and still not having processes in place to allow smudging (a very basic and long-requested need). Added to this tension, even if the Presenter/programmer is educated their team may not be and it’s typically someone else who’s delegated as the liaison on-site.”

“In regards to applying practices based on cultural ways of knowing and doing, non-Indigenous presenters should be aware that not all protocols and spaces are welcome to them.”

3. Hosting

Presenting is an act of hospitality, and presenters should consider their role as hosts. This is an opportunity to deepen relationships, engage empathy, and alter imbalanced power dynamics. Can we implement radical hospitality as a core value?

“How open are we to welcoming people (artists) into our venues without restriction? It seems like a basic principle, but institutions are predisposed to make rules of engagement that get in the way of relationship building.”

“It’s really important for presenters to prioritize relationships. “To be a host is to be a giver” (Lacey Hill).”

4. Relationships and Collaboration

Working together and sharing resources is a clear way forward for Slow Touring. Presenters should consider the artists they present as equal collaborators; partner with other community organizations beyond the performing arts to expand opportunities; and connect with one another to generously share ideas and resources. The “abundance mindset” is an alternative to the scarcity mindset that informs so many decisions in our sector.

“Getting out of short-term crisis management mode requires a change of perspective on how much can be achieved through mutualisation, starting with knowledge and contacts.”

“Gathering regularly to nurture an interdisciplinary cross-sectoral community of practice comes high on the list of practitioners’ needs, to break down silos and isolation, foster trust-based collaborative relationships based on trust and propagate innovative ideas and bolster confidence.”

What’s Next?

Ontario Presents is now seeking funding for the next phase of the Slow Touring Project, which would allow us to conduct pilot projects putting the ideas from this report into action. We are partnering with Réseau SPARC Network (Supporting Performing Arts in Rural and Remote Communities), Folk Music Ontario, and Debajehmujig Theatre Group for this next phase. Whether or not this specific pilot project phase is funded, OP is committed to incorporating these transformative principles into our ongoing work as much as possible. We invite you to explore the report and find ways to incorporate Slow Touring principles into your work as well.

Increasing community engagement on tour: why and how?

BY FANNY MARTIN / ART OF FESTIVALS

Introduction

This report is based on an earlier body of research on participatory and community-engaged arts that formed the basis for a series of webinars, workshops and mentoring sessions developed for another Ontario Presents initiative, ArtsEngage (2020-2022), on recent informal conversations and observations at several national and international professional gatherings that took place between August and October 2022 and on one-to-one interviews with Ontario performing arts professionals to corroborate findings and test hypothesis (see lists below).

Professional gatherings:

- [Orchestras Canada Western Orchestras Regional Meeting and Learning Sessions](#) - August 2022, Regina (orchestral music, music education & participation)
- [tanzmesse](#) - August-September 2022, Düsseldorf, Germany (contemporary dance)
- [FiraTàrrega](#) - September 2022, Tàrrega, Spain (outdoor arts, art in public space, circus & street arts)
- [IETM Plenary](#) - September-October 2022, Belgrade, Serbia (contemporary performing arts + [BITEF](#) theatre festival)

Interviews:

- Sam Varteniuk, [Registry Theatre](#) (Kitchener)
- [Joanne Churchill](#), Arts Education & Outreach specialist
- Jayson Duggan, Performing Arts Manager, [Kingson Grand Theatre](#)

Thank you also to members of [CATR](#) and [SQET](#) who contributed their thoughts on this topic.

Longer, Slower, Deeper: Dimensions of Change

A. Definitions & Inspirations

“Slow touring expresses a desire (from artists, communities, tour presenters and funding bodies) for audiences to experience a deeper engagement with a touring performance, often through activities such as skill sharing (e.g. workshops, residencies, exchanges and collaborations).” and collaboration on creative projects (e.g. recreating the work for/with local audiences).”

*(Source: [Slow touring: longer, slower, deeper](#) by Rachael Jennings in *AusDance*, 2014)*

Slow Touring takes inspiration from the wider Slow Movement, such as [Slow Tourism](#) – a movement to “redefin(e) the tourist experience as the intention to discover the particular characteristics of a place while respecting the locality and its inhabitants” ... – and [Slow Food](#) – a way of life “promoted as an alternative to fast food (that) strives to preserve traditional and regional cuisine and encourages farming of plants, seeds, and livestock characteristic of the local ecosystem. It promotes local small businesses and sustainable foods. It also focuses on food quality, rather than quantity.” (source: *Wikipedia*)

Pre-COVID, artists were already making statements about the costs of touring on their physical and mental health and on the environment; post-COVID, touring has become even more risky, with cancellations likely to come either from the cast, the airline or the audience themselves. The back-to-back touring schedules that seem to make financial sense are increasingly seen as contributing not just to artist burn-out, but also to audience indifference, who may not have strong reasons to favour going to a show they don't relate to over a night in or another form of cultural gathering.

B. Limitations

While some definitions of Slow Touring are explicitly focused on the relational benefits of spending more time in a locality – community engagement, audience nurturing, authentic encounters – the term is also often used to refer to the “green” benefits of foregoing ‘fast’ modes of transportation (i.e. planes) in favour of softer and slower road- and water-based methods – usually trains. The question of sustainability is no doubt crucial to the performing arts sector, but cannot be reduced to a simple change of transportation, which has little relevance outside the dense historical rail networks of mainland Europe (where, incidentally, train fares are often more expensive than air fares, causing some funders to add a ‘rail bonus’ to arts grants).

As this dimension is clearly not applicable to the Ontario context, especially outside large urban centres, we have been testing, throughout the course of this research period, the alternative concept of **Deep Touring** to emphasise the people angle and the increased time spent on site – as opposed to alluding to the time spent in-between touring dates. If Slow Touring is about the artist taking more time to make the journey part of their experience, Deep Touring is about increased contact time, more conversations, better mutual knowledge between a visiting artist and a community they are touring to.

References:

- a. For an example of Slow Touring equated with ‘taking the train’, see [Take the Green Train initiative](#) (Jazz Europe Network)
- b. See also this [Open Letter to Jérôme Bel](#) by Mexican artist Lázaro Gabino Rodríguez as a reaction to the ‘privileged’ position of established artists choosing to stop flying

C. Dimensions

To guide informal and structured conversations on these complex issues, different dimensions were considered:

→ WHAT can we slow down?

- Time spent to create, produce, iterate
- Time spent on site
- Time spent in between places (slower travel, more time at home base...)

→ WHY should we slow down?

- More resting, thinking, evaluating time (reconsidering “producing” as a process that is not solely geared towards tangible outputs)
- More unstructured time (allowing for play, discovery, low-expectation experimentation)
- More overlapping time (to meet residents, local artists, other touring artists... to explore, start something new, present something else...)

→ HOW can we slow down? (What are the critical change levers?)

- Producing cycle and practices (from funding to rehearsal times...)
- Tour booking (especially artist-presenter relationship)
- Evaluation and critical reflection (especially to assess and amplify the local impact of touring productions / projects).

Barriers to Change

The desire to slow down, rest and reflect more, produce less and better, and prioritise health and relationships has been a COVID-time leitmotif, and emergency measures at several levels – from CERB to virtual residencies and rapid research-creation grants – recognised and responded to these needs. Structural barriers remain in place to prevent change from spreading further into frameworks and practices, such as the following ones identified through this research as relevant to the Ontario context:

A. Unfavourable Frameworks

- **Funding:** developmental activities, such as community engagement, research-led artist exchange and participatory residencies, represent only a fraction of the total budgets allocated to arts funding, and are complicated and lengthy to obtain.
- **Unions:** it may be challenging for unionised venues to try to implement initiatives that have no direct income generation mechanism, such as creation residencies, as their high staff costs would typically not be covered by most grants.

- **Space:** municipal presenters may be required to ‘pay’ for their own rehearsal or performing space through an internal accounting system, which puts non-income-generating activities at an unfavourable competition with commercial rentals.

B. Perception of Value

- **Advocacy:** accessing the right tools, data and mechanisms to evidence the benefits of investing more in cultural activities is a concern that comes back time and time again when discussing change with practitioners, who often feel like they have to start again from scratch at regular intervals. While research is increasingly distributed across the arts sector to provide such evidence, it is not always readily applicable by time-pressed local advocates or fully relevant to their specific context.
- **Local & longitudinal qualitative evaluation:** to evidence the complex, long-term and subtle benefits of the arts, low-cost participatory evaluation methods should be disseminated across the sector to develop skills, gather relevant data and equip local advocates with new, fresh, persuasive arguments.
- **Conflicting priorities:** the arts vs. sports debate is still alive – well beyond hockey, as highlighted by the recent controversy around the Paris Olympic Games (with the French government proposing to cancel major cultural festivals to focus security resources on the Games). Rural arts practitioners at the SPARC Symposium held a lively discussion on how to bridge the gap and collaborate with sports colleagues in their communities.

C. Training & Competencies

- **Lack of skills and confidence to teach creative & artistic activities:** Educators at primary and secondary school levels are increasingly not trained enough or not confident to lead creative activities. It’s not uncommon for teachers to be terrified of singing out loud, or to be dismissive of creative subjects on the curriculum (dance, theatre...) because they fear being exposed.
- **Lack of qualified outreach & engagement staff in the cultural sector:** staff shortage in the cultural sector has been exacerbated by COVID, especially beyond large urban centres. Community engagement, outreach & creative learning positions may be difficult to fund and fill in. These roles typically require highly developed people skills – such as communications and conflict resolution – and a solid working knowledge of equity and inclusion frameworks and practices, ideally with ongoing training and mentoring.
- **Lack of evaluation skills (and time):** developing grassroots experiments and aiming to grow audiences & communities in a personal, sustainable way is a long-term iterative process that requires constant evaluative thinking and adaptive methodologies. Relevant metrics, achievable monitoring mechanisms and adequate resources should be embedded from the onset to ensure that impacts are identified, analysed and amplified.

Levers of Change

A. Changing perspectives

- **Adopting an abundance mindset:** real or perceived lack of time, money or other resources forces us to allocate priorities to simply keep the lights on and maintain minimal service; however, this type of crisis response cannot lead to sustainable growth. Arts professionals in many countries besides Canada has been maintaining a narrative of decline and scarcity for many years, preventing imagination and collective action from transforming the sector, while “innovation” has been too often confused with technology and monetisation. Getting out of short-term crisis management mode requires a change of perspective on how much can be achieved through mutualisation, starting with knowledge and contacts. Generous sharing of success and failure, endorsements and recommendations to colleagues within and outside the sector, feedback on applications and pitches... are inexpensive ways to nurture a tight-knit and resourceful community of practice.
- **Defining “community” and “engagement”:** establishing a shared terminology is a crucial step in setting up a new project and working group to define the mode of engagement and type of community that the project will relate to.
 - To define the degree of ‘engagement’ at stake, Arnstein’s Ladder of Participation could form a basis for discussion to clarify the intended degree of autonomy and co-creation at stake.

(source: Arnstein, S.R. (1969). "A ladder of citizen participation". Journal of the American Institute of Planners (1969)
 - ‘Community’ should also be defined according to the shared factors that group people together, such as:
 - **Interest:** people who share the same interest or passion.
 - **Action:** people trying to bring about change.
 - **Place:** people brought together by geographic boundaries.
 - **Practice:** people in the same profession or undertake the same activities.
 - **Circumstance:** people brought together by external events/situations.
- **Setting an audience development direction:** research conducted by the Wallace Foundation and RAND Corporation in 2001 for their report [The New Framework for Building Participation in the Arts](#) evidenced 3 broad types of audience development strategies that require different tactics (with the recommendation that preferably only one, at most two directions should be engaged in at once):
 - **MORE OF THE SAME**
Broadening audiences by increasing their size
 - **NEW & DIFFERENT PEOPLE**
Diversifying audiences by bringing new groups into the fold
 - **SAME PEOPLE MORE OFTEN**
Deepening audience by enriching the experience of current participants

Just like defining the mode, scope and desired impact for 'engagement' and identifying what links people and groups them into a 'community', this type of strategic approach will greatly help to utilise resources efficiently, map out milestones, define tactics and set out metrics and evaluation methodologies.

B. Taking Small Local Steps

Creating an active and generative base for welcoming artists into a community needs to be a slow, steady and multidimensional process: beyond simply offering additional 'engagement' activities, resources should be invested in developing skills, rewarding involvement and nurturing a local culture of "art as civic good".

The following framework emerged from conversations with Ontario presenters and artists and have been further elaborated by using national and international references.

a. **Artist-Exchange (Creative Residencies)**

Format: Artist-in-Residence invited by a presenter to make use of space and equipment - and most crucially, to ask for community connections → local craftspeople and technicians, artists, experts in any domain they want to know more about. AiR develops ideas and a 'scratch' sharing concept to which everyone they have been in contact with (and their own networks) is invited.

Who: 1 artist (or small company) in residence; local artists & creatives of all disciplines; regular audience invited to workshops / final sharing.

Benefits: freewheeling creative, artistic & relational development for the AiR; stronger community connections to other artists and to the presenter for local artists; emergence of an artistic concept (not necessarily leading directly to a production / presentation)

Challenges: uncertain, variable outcomes;

b. **Arts Ambassadors (Professional Development Activities)**

Format: On the model of PD days for teachers: offering access to a show (with audience) and targeted artist-led workshops to develop skills and connections

Who: For teachers, librarians, social & health workers (cf. Social Prescribing), community volunteers, freelance arts workers...

Benefits: developing a community of practice, increasing confidence & skills of local arts educators & non-specialised teachers, training local outreach & engagement (freelance) staff. Could offer certification or other form of professional recognition.

Challenges: outreach / sign-up may be slow; format (e.g. timing, duration...) should be driven by local needs and availability.

c. **Community Preview (Advance Touring Activities)**

Format: advance activities (6-8 weeks ahead of main presentation) in community spaces such as schools, care homes, libraries, community centres... by the touring artist, local artists and/or local Arts Ambassadors (see above). This could be exploring the themes of the touring piece through community dialogue, offering training in technical / artistic aspects (text, dramaturgy, lighting, choreography...), presenting a 'showcase' version, proposing co-creation workshops to write music or poetry, inviting people to build elements of the set...

Who: school & university students, library & community centre users, social service clients, care home residents... While these activities can drive ticket sales for the actual performance, they could also offer an authentic engagement with artists & artistic activities to people who would not be able to attend (for reasons of health, mobility, social perception...).

Benefits: wider outreach, deeper engagement, advance publicity for tour, social narrative.

Challenges: cost of bringing artist / company ahead of performance dates (could be mitigated by well-conceived engagement activities that can be delivered by local artists); additional cost that may not translate immediately into increased ticket sales.

C. Gathering & Structuring

Gathering regularly to nurture an interdisciplinary cross-sectoral community of practice comes high on the list of practitioners' needs, to break down silos and isolation, foster trust-based collaborative relationships based on trust and propagate innovative ideas and bolster confidence.

Formats to envisage include:

- **In person gatherings**: for example, an annual conference to celebrate efforts and achievements, forge strong connections across the network, spotlight a different region each time, develop advocacy goals and tactics.
- **Online regular meetings**: virtual meetings to maintain connections - for example, monthly drop-in on a regular day ("Last Fridays", "First Tuesdays"...) which could have a structured part (sector updates, guest speaker...) and a networking section (using breakout rooms to facilitate exchange across specific themes or other factors).
- **Training courses & mentoring sessions**: this could be organised in collaboration with other sector partners (such as WorkInCulture). The [Action Learning co-coaching framework](#), widely used in the UK arts sector, would be particularly beneficial to creative facilitators and community engagement specialists to support their reflective practice and boost their confidence in believing in the impact of small steps.

REFERENCES & RESOURCES

- [**Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations**](#) (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation)
Investigating the changing relationship between the public and arts organisations and the implications for institutions receiving public investment to articulate more clearly the value they bring, including to their local communities.
→ See [case study bank](#) (best practice from 80 arts organisations from around the world), [guiding principles](#), and the annual [Awards for Civic Arts Organisations](#)

- [**Perform Europe: Research & Case Studies**](#) (2022)
18-month EU-wide research & piloting project to “rethink cross-border performing arts presentation in a more inclusive, sustainable and balanced way”, with 19 artistic projects supported out of over 1,000 applications to an Open Call.

- [**Farnham Maltings \(UK\): International Resources**](#) (2020-2021)
Especially:
 - Top Tips for Touring Participatory Work
 - Alternative Models of Touring (with many case studies)

- [**Mark Morris Dance Group: Community Engagement on Tour**](#)
Menu of enrichment activities offered by international company MMDG (see in particular *Sample Programming* on the last tab)

- [**New Theatre in Your Neighbourhood**](#) (2013-2015)
2-year pilot project to create place-based engagement around touring productions and support regional presenters towards producing their own locally-relevant activities and shows

- [**Rural Touring UK**](#)
Benefits & impacts of rural touring: <https://www.ruraltouring.org/facts-figures/>

- [**Concept Touring**](#)
Commissioning R&D by LIFT to create “international touring projects with little or no human travel”
Kris Nelson on the Future of Concept Touring: <https://www.liffestival.com/the-future-of-concept-touring/>

- [**Case Study**](#): Danielle Micich's 2012 Western Australian tour of the dance work *Shiver*, which successfully managed and delivered community engagement activities. ([Video](#): *Shiver* tour documentary (6') <https://youtu.be/t7j1S9IPjGo>).

- [**A Restless Art**](#) (How participation won, and why it matters) – François Matarasso
Free e-book download (2019) + regular blog articles & podcasts

SLOW TOURING: Commissions and Residency

BY FRANCO BONI

Context

Slow Touring is a cultural expression that implies process and simplicity. It is the antithesis of convenience. It rails against the dominance of social media marketing and the fever pitch of consumption that has characterized the last century of art making. Most of Canada's cultural institutions have come of age in this period, and patterns are hard to break.

If anything, the past two years of the pandemic has granted the creative community permission to reinvent new ways of working and being together. We acknowledge that the old ways privileged shorter rehearsal periods, a 'get in and get out' presentation schedule, little or no social engagement with audiences, and greater inequity.

The pandemic has pushed many of us in the sector to the brink of relevance; yet, my conversations and research about slow touring have been hopeful. My interviews are full of examples of how artists, institutions and audiences have prioritized 'slow' projects that deepen our sense of belonging and build community. The following examples represent successful cultural exchanges, where the responsibility lies not only with the host and local audience, but with the touring artists.

- Fixed Point Residency in St. Catharine's FirstOntario PAC
- Tracey Wright Global Archive program at The Theatre Centre
- Compass Festival in Leeds, UK
- Rheostatic concerts as part of One Yellow Rabbit's High Performance Rodeo Festival
- The Posh Club by Duckie, occurring in community spaces throughout the UK
- Catalyst Theatre based in Edmonton develop and premiere their work in Fort McMurray

Commissions and Residency

Questions and ideas that emerged from the research that warrant more investigation include:

1. Festivals in small urban centres play an essential role in the development of artists and new work.
2. Large institutions partnering and supporting small hyper local arts groups has led to many successful commission and residencies.

3. Residencies take time.
4. How do we retrofit our structures (venues) so that they can sustain different types of artistic process?
5. We need to connect with our purpose. Why are we hosting an artist? Why are we investing in our community? Why this idea now?
6. The antidote for an atomized and disengaged community is participation in the performing arts.
7. Inviting an artist to make a work in your community is rare and special. It's not meant to be commonplace
8. How do we rethink hospitality?
9. Touring requires traveling to another community, and travel contributes to the climate crisis. I don't want to live in a world where art and cultural exchange are not possible.

Beautiful things can occur when we slow down. We find new ways to share resources, to collaborate, and to dream.

Ideas to Action

The pilot project I propose is deceptively simple, but in practice is extremely difficult. It should include the presenter institution, artist and some community.

Identify radical hospitality as a core philosophical value.

How open are we to welcoming people (artists) into our venues without restriction? It seems like a basic principle, but institutions are predisposed to make rules of engagement that get in the way of relationship building.

Artists too can create barriers. They are often quick to 'help', instead of listening and learning.

The pandemic has made audiences fearful of engagement. Fewer and fewer people are participating in the performing arts. How do we create understanding with strange ideas and strangers?

A place to start: I encourage you to review Lois Weaver's [Public Address System techniques](#).

Indigenous Approaches to Touring

BY BRIT JOHNSTON

“Make touring fun again! It can be when it's not just all about the business”

Context

I, Brit Johnston (Anishaabekwe), met with ten arts and culture workers living and working across Ontario, the majority of the group self-identifying as Indigenous and having an Indigenous arts practice. It may also be relevant to note that of the ten participants

- 4 manage Indigenous performing arts companies that both tour and present work
- 4 manage a venue/ performing arts space
- 3 identify as Independent Artists
- 3 identify as professional Musicians
- 3 identify as professional Theatre Artists
- 2 identify as professional Dance Artists
- 3 identify as having a community-based arts practice
- 1 participant is a member of Ontario Presents (non-Indigenous)

Through consultation, we wanted to learn how current touring structures (pre and post-pandemic) have impacted Indigenous artists and how they have been evolving their practices to develop healthier models. These consultations occurred through intimate group sessions as well as one-on-one interviews over Zoom and phone calls.

Findings

Mino-Bimaadiziwin is a term in Anishinaabemowin, the Ojibway language, which loosely means “the way of a good life or “living in a good way”. This ideology is shared among many Indigenous peoples and has been echoed throughout the consultation sessions. Almost all participants seemed to have already been considering and applying new ideas related to slow touring within their own artistic practices. They were able to provide many examples of how we could build a more responsible touring sector that respected the health of artists (mind, body, spirit) and supported meaningful relationship building.

With the shadow of the pandemic on all our minds, we can all agree in the performing arts sector, we have re-evaluated our priorities, wants and needs. There seem to be two camps of artists; 1) Artists excited about getting back on the road to tour far and wide, and 2) Artists who express being uninterested in returning to the previous model, described by many as unsustainable. What is unsustainable about our traditional Canadian touring model?

Points of Tension

Time/schedules

- “You lose track of where you’re going when you’re schedule is too fast”; “Scramble - race to the airport, to the gig”
- There’s not enough time in one place to connect with the local community
- Presenters tend to create tight schedules
- Presenters (some) don’t consider hospitality. “But artists sometimes are going into towns and cities blind. When do the restaurants close? Are they all closed by the time I finish a gig? I’ve learned I have to request having snacks in my dressing room in my rider, just in case”.

Health (mental/emotional/physical)

- “Artists are some of the most burnt-out individuals”
- Artists are expected to give 100% every night presenting a show, they can’t show any weak points, it’s a very vulnerable experience
- Long tours mean being away from family for extended periods of time; “amount of time away from home is taxing on your spirit”.
- We need better funding. Touring artists, especially smaller companies, are lucky to break even after a tour.

Relationships

- Many Indigenous artists are creating work that speaks on Indigenous themes and their goal is to reach kin. Thus, the responsibility of outreach (getting the host community’s members into the audience) falls onto the artist/company because many presenters have not spent enough time building good relations.
- What works in one community may not work in another; cookie-cutter touring can actually be harmful to community members if the appropriate resources aren’t in place.
- Feasting/eating in and with community (including the presenting company) would help to build relationships.
- Many presenters lack the cultural competency required for building good relations with Indigenous artists, including knowing which territory they occupy and still not having processes in place to allow smudging (a very basic and long-requested need). Added to this tension, even if the Present/programmer is educated their team may not be and it’s typically someone else who’s delegated as the liaison on-site. Many of the conflicts happen on-site with contracted staff not familiar with the artist/company.

Though these barriers may seem intimidating it’s important to recognise that creating change takes time and patience, and is a group effort. As one participant pointed out, it’s a “learning process... Being brave in the process and not being afraid to fail [is] an investment of both the artist, presenter, and community. [We are] learning from and with each other”.

Learnings from Indigenous Companies

Slow Touring = Knowledge Sharing (Lacey Hill)

“A tour is a machine - that is not our Indigenous way of doing things” (Cynthia Lickers-Sage)

What is being slowed down?

Moving from TRANSACTIONAL to VISCERAL

- Having more time in between tour destinations to be in the community
- Scheduling in rest time and creating schedules with flexibility in mind
 - Less focus on fitting in as many dates as possible
 - Artists need to be able to say no
 - Takes the pressure off the artist - a highly burned-out profession
- A dream: to drive slowly across the country, take time to hike, be able to be in a place for more than a night
 - Stop for local food, recreational, gastronomy
 - Going to eat = medicine and fuel
- Spend time building long partnerships, and lots of them!
 - Not just for one-offs but for long-term
 - ASK: What's the minimum time frame we need to see the outcome we're looking for? INSTEAD OF the maximum time we would want to complete a partnership and move on to the next thing.

Relationship Building

1. Artist-Presenter

“We want to SLOW down the transactional component”.

- Really important for Presenters to prioritize relationships
 - “To be a host is to be a giver” (Lacey Hill)
 - Connecting to presenters as an artist can be a challenge
 - Many times the organizer is not there to welcome the artist - someone else is delegated to facilitate
 - Be thoughtful, be empathetic
- Artists would like better communication - this will help build trust
 - Feeling safe. Feeling taken care of. Host matters.
 - Artists communicate through different avenues - email vs Facebook vs Instagram vs phone
 - Want for Presenters to be more flexible; examples of Presenters being strict about only using email even though the artist made a request to communicate through another mode.
 - Social media has become a powerful tool for the Marketing and

Communications manager to gather community. If that team member is not properly educated on how to market performance and to what community - it could be detrimental for that artist.

2. Artist-Community

Artists make art for the community – this is especially true for Indigenous creators

- Concern: Not able to connect with the community - no time
- Indigenous artists are making different choices for different communities
- Consider opportunities to collaborate with local artists
- Invite cast/company to make room in the schedule to visit a special place or eat local community food. It was suggested that companies may include in these requests in their technical rider.

Good Practices for Consideration

- Many artists mentioned they really appreciate curated talkbacks and any opportunity to talk to the community about the messages and the themes in their work.
- Welcome Feasting
- Make sure there's food & water & non-gendered restrooms
- Are you able to offer space to work during the day / when offstage?
- Are you able to offer childcare?

Examples of Indigenous Approaches to Touring

Example 1: Pre-show Process

- Start: Be approached by the venue, then reach out to the local community.
- How? Write a letter to the band council or liaison asking for permission to come onto land, wish to meet with the community, is there anything we should be aware of re: protocol. Always follow up if no response.
- A dark day would be the day to interact with the community (feast)
- Example of a company that chose to budget part of their artist fee towards the feasting with community.
 - Could the Presenter take on this expense? Could they include this in their programming budget?
- Santee Smith tries to meet with local dancers – aiming to inspire the next generation.
- Inviting the community to come behind the scenes, backstage to learn.
- The tour manager would be doing outreach 2-3 weeks ahead of arriving at a venue/in a community.

Example 2: Community Outreach

- This Artist/Presenter prioritizes connecting to existing networks
- They want to join the conversations already taking place in that community
- START by doing an Assessment
 - Does this community have the resources/support?
 - Will those organizations partner with us? Can they be on-site to offer

- in-person support?
 - How can we boost their message and services through our work?
 - Ensure that we are not causing more harm than good.
- Can we offer workshops to the community that the organization already serves?

Example 3: Changing the touring model

- This artist changed her touring model to dates that are spread out. She builds a tour in chunks of time.
- One show tours for 2-3 days/month. Goes home in between.
- Impact: Still able to commit to responsibilities at home, which include being a mother, wife, a teacher, and running her own community-based arts & culture studio.

Environmental Impact of Touring in Canada

- This topic was the most difficult for artists to tackle - feeling uncertain because touring needs to happen and it's always going to be expensive in Canada because the landmass is just so BIG. Travelling causes pollution.
 - "Stopping touring would be the best way but it's essential for the arts. We need to present our work in front of audiences" (Carlos Rivera).
- Don't have the option to think about an environmental impact.
 - "We have to get there to do the work.... We are an environmental-focused band... We talk about land and caring for it in our message... In our songs. It's genuinely difficult" (Skye Polson).
- Canada is huge, to move from one point to another you need time, and resources, traveling in the country is expensive, and moving cargo is very hard. The cost is enormous.
- Suggestion: Presenters could make a point of providing local catering and services.
- Hybrid model may be part of the solution - less physical travel
- Virtual touring. Northern communities are able to access touring shows they never access before. One-two artists from a company will visit the community to do artist talks/workshops and show the production. Minimizes the eco-footprint.
- The Oculus / the virtual world - we should be exploring this internationally and with the younger audience. Companies investing in virtual space - an entry point to offer to the next generation. To be open to new and innovative ideas.
 - That brings into question the technological impact on the environment; massive energy usage, mineral mining for equipment, electronic waste, land usage for storing data.
- Trying to respond to local needs first.

Cultural Considerations

There's one very important point that needs to be stated before going on to propose revised touring practices based on learnings from Indigenous arts and culture workers. In the final thoughts shared by an Indigenous arts manager, they said that the adaptations to the touring model (i.e. learnings we've gathered from these consultations from Indigenous artists) might just "be our own way of doing things. They [our non-Indigenous colleagues] don't need to adopt all our protocols".

In regards to applying practices based on cultural ways of knowing and doing, non-Indigenous presenters should be aware that not all protocols and spaces are welcome to them. Further, when learning new-to-you cultural protocols, it's extremely important to act responsibly and fully understand the meaning of specific actions. In an example of this, offered by an Indigenous musician, a well-intentioned Festival Presenter offered tobacco ties to artists before their performances. The act of offering tobacco has a specific implication; upon accepting this medicine, that individual then takes on the responsibility of carrying a message or prayer from the giver. In the specific scenario, the Artist had to pause the Presenter and question their expectations. If the receiver is not in the right headspace, they will turn down the tobacco tie, which is fine, but it's important for the giver to understand this interaction.

Perhaps this kind of well-intentioned energy could be put towards:

- Ensuring that your venue has smudging protocols and you can offer a safe space for ceremony pre- and post-performance. It was mentioned more than once that many venues still aren't providing this service and are continuing to treat ceremonial practices with disrespect;
- Educating not only Presenters but their operational and production teams. Racism is still prevalent. In many cases it's an Artist Liaison or Technician interacting with the artists, they should have cultural competency.
 - "It's an oversight to not educate your staff as a presenter - not only about the artist but... [about] the communities they represent" (Skye Polson).
- Holding space for connection. Programmers need built-in time for conversation and education between the artist and the audience.
 - "Indigenous stories may have heavier topics that need time and space after the showing to work through emotions. People have questions... Need time to communicate [with the audience]" (Carlos Rivera).

Questions for the Future

- Will we be continuing the Hybrid Model?
 - Now that we're back in-person what happens with all the digital presenting infrastructure that our sector invested in?
 - We've heard Presenters say they never want to see another digital production - that's dangerous thinking
 - Digital presenting creates ACCESS for so many sects of the population
 - Virtual touring. Northern communities are able to access touring shows they never access before. Geo-touring.
 - The Oculus - should our sector be investing in virtual real estate? Can we get our funders on board?
- Funders: Importance of funding dark days - currently not supported (Canada Council). Could consider funding increase; Most companies do not break even.
- How does Slow Touring change things for people who have disabilities?
 - "Touring excludes these groups of people" (G.R. Gritt).
- Equity [union] Rules: Touring northern Ontario is difficult because cities are so spread out. Sometimes issue arise between how the company schedules tours and equity/union rules. Equity has strict rules. Small communities don't have the same facilities, fewer resources. Rural communities are excited to host companies and want to share their own stories but Equity rules get in the way.
- Many artists don't know what resources are available

- How do arts service organizations and funders better communicate their existence and create programs that better reach and serve artists?
- Can we extinguish the Showcase model?
 - No more 15-min gigs! No more showcasing for free. Harmful.
- Would it be possible to bring your family on tour?
 - Incredibly difficult for people with families to tour work - this affects majority women.