

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

OVERVIEW

This document is a written representation of The Downstage Performance Society's mandate and values. The principles laid out in this document are meant to act as the framework from which decisions about all elements of company life are made. The values which inform our work apply not only to those individuals who come into contact with us through our work, but also to the employees and authors of this document. Downstage is accountable to the community.

The outcome of this document will be guidelines that enhance each individual's sense of well-being in our collective experiences. People should feel empowered to share their feedback and should be able to see how our guidelines are responsive over time.

ACCESSING AND COLLABORATING ON THIS DOCUMENT

This document is meant to be easily accessible with processes for change clearly identified. Downstage welcomes all collaborators and the public to discuss, comment and provide feedback to Downstage regarding this document should they wish to do so. We will be workshoping this current document from Nov. 1st 2022- June 1st 2023 and are accepting feedback from all members of our community. If you are interested in providing any questions, critiques, or thoughts regarding this document or Downstage's approach to anti-oppression more broadly, please contact Artistic Director Clare Preuss at clare@downstage.ca. You can also submit anonymous feedback through a survey which can be accessed here: <https://form.jotform.com/220726775852060>. Changes and amendments to this document are ongoing and will continue to be indefinitely. Beyond June 2023, Downstage's Guiding Principles document will continue to be available for further conversions. Our intent is for this to be a living document which will be continuously updated to reflect the evolving, shifting needs of our community.

The intent of this document is to:

1. Invite collaborators into an environment that is welcoming and prioritizes the health and well-being of all involved. We recognize that our employees, contracted artists, community partners, and audiences have differing needs and

come from a variety of lived experiences. Prioritizing health and well-being of all means anticipating these needs, and putting in place the tools necessary for people to feel welcomed and cared for in our spaces.

2. Outline the ways that we plan on reducing harm and creating a more equitable space. Minimizing harm in the creation process is of the utmost importance and this document will describe the values and processes through which harm reduction is embedded in various points of our operations.
3. Act as a set of principles from which we are able to enforce standards of care. If harm is reported, it is our duty to investigate deeper and offer mechanisms through which people can return to a position of feeling cared for.

GROUNDING PRINCIPLES

CREATING NEW STRUCTURES

Downstage operates on stolen land and is a beneficiary of the colonial legacies of the region and industry it resides in. We are dedicated to dismantling the structures of white supremacy and colonialism which inform the ways we work with and alongside one another. Ceding power, ease, and access in favour of equity and justice is a constantly evolving practice.

OUR FULL SELVES

We invite people to bring their full selves in their interactions with us. Downstage wants to create work environments where every individual involved feels heard and respected. To accomplish this, we strive to meet the accessibility needs of every person who interacts with our company. We recognize that needs and perspectives can shift over time and as such, are committed to fostering environments where communication is ongoing.

HEALTH, WELLNESS AND DIGNITY

We aim to centre folks who are most directly impacted by systems of oppression because systems of oppression are omnipresent in and outside of our creative spaces. If we prioritize with this intentional effort to centre the health, wellness and dignity of those made most vulnerable by systems of oppression, we centre everyone's health, wellness and dignity.

HOLDING COMPLEXITY

We engage with the complexities of both the issues we tackle, and the people impacted by said issues. In the process of art making, Downstage aims to never trivialize, reduce, or exploit any cause or identity.

DISRUPTING AND DISMANTLING HIERARCHIES OF POWER

Creating caring, inclusive, and accessible spaces means we are constantly working to dismantle hierarchies of power. We are receptive to change and are willing to be malleable to new, more equitable, ways of doing things.

ACCOUNTABILITY

We are accountable to one another, and are prepared to hold space for dissent and discomfort as it arises. In the event that mistakes are made or people are hurt, we will not act with the intent to penalize. The goal is to produce less harm, and we intend to navigate difficult circumstances with care and respect for the well being of all parties. We reject abuse of any kind, but believe that accountability and punishment are not one and the same.

GROUNDING METHODOLOGIES

PROCESS:

Integration of Grounding Values into Our Work

Our process includes welcoming staff, contract artists, volunteers and public into interactions that are rooted in our guiding values stated above. Downstage offers access to these guiding values in these following ways:

- Downstage website: PDF and audio versions of the document
- Contracts: Guiding Values are embedded in all contracts for new employees, collaborators, board members, and hired artists
- Physical materials: Our guiding values will be posted publicly and in clear view within our offices, rehearsal spaces, and for all live performances.
- Room agreements: At the beginning of each workshop, program and production process, we will review our guiding principles. We will also create a group agreement specifically focused on the group of individuals gathering for the project.

Downstage is committed to responding to instances of discomfort, conflict and/or harm within our ongoing activities. It is important to us that each person we engage with feels empowered to share any instances of discomfort, conflict and/or harm with a sense of confidence that the issue will be addressed by Downstage staff and/or board members effectively and in a timely manner.

DISCOMFORT: A feeling of uneasiness, anxiety and/or embarrassment

CONFLICT: A serious disagreement, argument, variance and/or clash

HARM: To damage or injure physically, emotionally and/or mentally

When Discomfort, Conflict and/or Harm Take Place:

We believe everyone is the expert of their own experience and will take claims of discomfort, conflict and/or harm seriously and without skepticism. In the event that harm is experienced, Downstage will have multiple channels for reporting available so that individuals can express their needs in ways that feel most comfortable. Individuals can:

- Communicate with Stage Management

- Communicate with the CAEA Deputy assigned to each ITA production
- Communicate with CAEA's Haven Helpline for any ITA contracts: 1-855-201-7823
- Communicate with any member of the Downstage Staff
- Email Downstage Board Chair, Maureen Sheppard, at masheppard@mtroyal.ca.

OUTCOME:

If there is a need to address an occurrence that is not in alignment with our guiding values, Downstage is responsible for addressing, investigating and resolving workplace issues in accordance with provincial labour law. When working under ITA contracts, we are also responsible to adhere to Not in Our Space Guidelines: <https://www.caea.com/Features/Not-In-Our-Space>.

We will continue to amend the guiding values as we receive feedback from our community. In November of 2022, Downstage hosted a session with various Downstage community members to discuss this document and how to continue developing it. Downstage is currently working with Nikki Shaffeeullah to create the next iteration of this document and supporting processes. Our Guiding Principles is reviewed by Downstage Internal Committee and Downstage staff semi-annually and, any suggestion for changes to the Guiding Principles will be addressed and incorporated as is agreed upon by Downstage staff and our Board of Directors Internal Committee.

PLEASE NOTE: Downstage is currently working to create a detailed policy that outlines step by step processes beyond Not in Our Space and provincial labour laws.

This document was created by Downstage staff in consultation with Nikki Shaffeeullah and Downstage Board of Directors and community members.