

# TO Live Strategic Alignment

*Briefing Note*



DECEMBER 2024

*Submitted to: TO Live Leadership Team*

---

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Part 1: How We Align</b>	<b>4</b>
Alignment with the Culture Plan's Vision and Guiding Principles	5
How Alignments were Identified	6
Detailed Analysis	12
TO Live Pillar 1: Creative Community Hubs	12
TO Live Pillar 2: Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access	17
TO Live Pillar 3: Sustainability and Environmental Impact	22
<b>Part 2: How We Can Grow Together</b>	<b>24</b>
Areas of Opportunity: Strengthening the Partnership between TO Live and the City	25



# Introduction

This document's purpose is to equip leadership and staff at TO Live with a clear accounting of how your work and strategic directions align with those of the City of Toronto<sup>1</sup>. We know that the work of TO Live aligns directly with the newly approved '*Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025-2035)*'<sup>2</sup> and '*Sidewalks to Skylines: A 10-Year Action Plan for Toronto's Economy (2025 – 2035)*'<sup>3</sup> but also to a broader range of citywide strategies. This memo not only demonstrates the alignment between TO Live's *Making Space: Strategic Plan (2023 - 2027)* and annual Impact Reporting with City priorities, but also spotlights opportunities for a stronger, more mutually beneficial relationship between the two organizations.

This document is organized into two sections:

1. **How We Align**, which demonstrates how TO Live is already delivering or has delivered on many of the City's priorities, with reference to the Culture Plan, but also to other city-led initiatives.
2. **How We Grow Together**, which demonstrates key opportunity areas for how TO Live and the City can offer each other support, whether that's through cross-promotion, capacity building, or a range of other approaches to resource sharing.

---

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this document, *City of Toronto* will be referred to as the '**City**'

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this document, '*Culture Connects: An Action Plan for Culture in Toronto (2025-2035)*' will be referred to as the '**Culture Plan**'

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this document, '*Sidewalks to Skylines: A 10-Year Action Plan for Toronto's Economy (2025 – 2035)*' will be referred to as the '**Economic Development Plan**'



# Part 1: How We Align

*How TO Live is advancing City of Toronto priorities*

## Alignment with the Culture Plan's Vision and Guiding Principles

TO Live's *Making Space: Strategic Plan (2023 - 2027)* and impact reporting from recent years highlights how the work of the organization meaningfully delivers on the City's overall vision for culture: **"a city where everyone everywhere can discover, create and experience culture, and where culture is valued and prized as an integral part of our daily lives."** This can be seen through TO Live's diverse programming including initiatives like Making Space and mentorship programs, and through diverse partnerships (both local and international). TO Live is already achieving or striving to achieve many of the same priorities and goals of the Culture Plan. Below is an overview of topline alignments between TO Live's strategic pillars and the Culture Plan principles:

- TO Live's venues are already serving as important cultural spaces. With their first priority to become **"creative community hubs"**, and with new initiatives like Making Space, the role of their venues to serve Toronto's diverse communities, align with the **Culture Plan's Priority 1: Culture Everywhere**, which includes a target to develop "one million square feet of new cultural space in Toronto" over the next 10 years by expanding the use of and protection of existing cultural spaces.
- TO Live's dedication to its strategic pillar 2 **"Inclusion, diversity, equity and access"** aligns with many of the Culture Plan's priorities, namely **Culture Plan's Priority 2: Culture for All**. This priority includes objectives to advance equitable funding opportunities and improve access for Torontonians to experience culture. TO Live's dedication to supporting artists through *Making Space*, as well as recently launched mentorship programs, free and reduced ticket prices, and intentional partnerships that champion the work of BIPOC artists align closely with this priority and associated objectives.
- **TO Live Pillar 3: Sustainability and environmental impact** aligns closely with the **Culture Plan Priority 3: Culture for The Future and Priority 4: Culture Beyond Borders**. TO Live has demonstrated its commitment to building local and international partnerships and continues to highlight its position as a "go-to" global stage within Toronto. By further enhancing environmental efforts and prioritizing sustainability alongside financial resilience, TO Live illustrates its position as a leader in contributing to a long-lasting, vibrant arts community (sector sustainability) and overall promotion of Toronto talent and industry. In addition, TO Live's environmental goals of net zero buildings by 2040 align closely with the City's TransformTO Strategy.

TO Live's strategic pillars focus on values of social equity, reconciliation, and accessibility which closely align with the **Guiding Principles** of the Culture Plan. See [Table 2](#) for Values and Principles Alignment.

## How Alignments were Identified

Our team reviewed TO Live's Strategic Plan and impact reports alongside the City's recently approved Culture Plan, as well as other city plans including:

- Sidewalks to Skylines: A 10-Year Action Plan for Toronto's Economy (2025-2035)
- Reconciliation Action Plan (2022-2032)
- Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism
- TOcore Downtown Plan, OPA in effect
- TransformTO Net Zero Strategy Action Plan 2026-2030

Section 1 is organized by each of the three TO Live pillars from its *Making Space: Strategic Plan 2023-2027*:

1. **Creative Community Hubs**  
*Goal:* To serve Toronto's communities as an anchor cultural institution
2. **Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access**  
*Goal:* To proactively incorporate inclusion, diversity, equity, and access in every aspect of the organization
3. **Sustainability and Environmental Impact**  
*Goal:* To positively contribute to the city of Toronto's identity and progress

**Table 1: Summary of TO Live alignments with the City's Culture Plan and other priorities**

TO Live Strategic Plan Objective	Alignment with Culture Plan Priorities, Objectives or Actions	Alignment with other City Plans and Priorities
<b>Pillar 1: Creative Community Hubs</b>		
<b>1.1 Transform our venues into welcoming hubs daytime and nighttime, seven days a week</b>	<p><b>1 - Culture Everywhere</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>1.1</b> Develop new spaces and places for culture throughout the city</li> <li>• <b>1.2</b> Expand the use of and protect existing cultural spaces</li> </ul> <p><b>Urgent Actions identified:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect and expand existing spaces for culture to combat the displacement of creatives and industry in Toronto.</li> <li>• Open City- and privately-owned spaces for short- and long-term cultural uses.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Sidewalks to Skylines Plan Action 18 “Create space for inclusive entrepreneurship”</b> includes providing low-cost space for business startups, to create an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem that supports underrepresented groups, which could include the arts and culture industry.</p>
<b>1.2 Position TO Live venues as go-to places for cultural entertainment for locals and visitors to Toronto.</b>	<p><b>1 - Culture Everywhere</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>1.2.3</b> Develop tools to protect and strengthen cultural districts across the City</li> </ul> <p><b>4 - Culture Beyond Our Borders</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>4.1</b> Promote and advance Toronto talent and industry, locally, nationally, and internationally</li> <li>• <b>4.1.1</b> Bring the world to Toronto and Toronto to the world through international residences, creative exchange, and exhibition opportunities</li> </ul>	<p><b>Sidewalks to Skylines Action 28: Attract major international events and audiences</b> includes enhancing Toronto's capacity to host and incubate international events.</p> <p>The <b>TOcore Downtown Plan</b> identifies the King-Parliament neighbourhood as an important <b>“Cultural Precinct”</b> hub for creative industries and the cultural sector, highlighting in policy the need to strengthen these clusters. Both Meridian Hall and St.</p>

TO Live Strategic Plan Objective	Alignment with Culture Plan Priorities, Objectives or Actions	Alignment with other City Plans and Priorities
		Lawrence for the Arts are important anchors in this cultural precinct.
<b>1.3 Establish TO Live as a pillar organization for cultural engagement.</b>	<b>2 - Culture for All</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>2.3</b> Build and strengthen community and partnerships</li> </ul> <b>3 - Culture For The Future</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>3.1</b> Advance sector sustainability, and work with public and private funders to support adaptability and collaboration among cultural organizations</li> </ul>	
<b>Pillar 2: Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access</b>		
<b>2.1 Ensure TO Live is accessible to all Torontonians</b>	<b>2 - Culture for All</b> <p><b>Target:</b> “Every resident will have access to at least one free cultural experience in their neighbourhood supported by the City each month.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>2.1.1</b> Improve the distribution of the City’s cultural funding and other resources, with a focus on deepening support to Indigenous, Black, and equity-deserving communities, and communities outside the downtown core</li> <li><b>2.2.4</b> Prioritize greater access and accessibility for cultural venues, events and program</li> </ul>	The <b>TOcore Downtown plan</b> emphasizes the development of <b>complete communities that are accessible</b> and provide a range of amenities. This encourages a Downtown that continues to be liveable for all, regardless of ability.
<b>2.2 Represent the</b>	<b>1- Culture Everywhere</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1.2.1</b> Protect and expand existing spaces for</li> </ul>	TO Live’s mentorship and Making Space program align with the <b>Confronting Anti-Black Racism</b>

TO Live Strategic Plan Objective	Alignment with Culture Plan Priorities, Objectives or Actions	Alignment with other City Plans and Priorities
<p><b>diversity of Toronto on our stages, through our partnerships, and across the organization.</b></p>	<p>culture to combat the displacement of creatives and industry in Toronto</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>1.2.2</b> Open City- and privately-owned spaces of short- and long-term cultural uses</li> </ul> <p><b>3 - Culture For The Future</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>3.3.2</b> Propel development and growth of creatives, organizations, and sectors through training, mentorship, upskilling, knowledge sharing, and gathering</li> <li>• <b>3.3.3</b> Provide education, training and mentorship opportunities for creatives and organizations to grow and develop programs, services, spaces and original Intellectual Property</li> </ul>	<p><b>Action Plan</b>, which includes recommendations to increase employment and training opportunities for Black Torontonians in various sectors, which</p> <p>TO Live's work to amplify and honour Indigenous voices aligns with the <b>Reconciliation Action Plan</b> (Action 16: Celebrate Indigenous Arts and Culture and Action 20: Improve Indigenous Economic Development) <b>and the Economic Development Plan Action 5 ("Advance Indigenous Economic Development")</b></p>
<p><b>2.3 Embody the principles of equity and inclusion in TO Live culture.</b></p>	<p><b>3 - Culture For The Future</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>3.3</b> Expand pathways to employment in culture and the creative industries</li> <li>• <b>3.3.1</b> Work with employment, newcomer services and settlement agencies to reduce barriers to employment in cultural sectors and creative industries.</li> </ul>	<p>TO Live's internal processes, including the Committee Action Plan, aligns with <b>Reconciliation Action Plan's</b> values of decolonization and power-shifting, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable cultural landscape for Indigenous communities.</p> <p>The <b>Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism</b> calls for increased representation of Black individuals in leadership and decision-making roles across City institutions, including those involved in arts and culture.</p>
<p><b>Pillar 3: Sustainability and Environmental Impact</b></p>		

TO Live Strategic Plan Objective	Alignment with Culture Plan Priorities, Objectives or Actions	Alignment with other City Plans and Priorities
<b>3.1</b> <b>Showcase the economic and artistic impact of TO Live to the city of Toronto, province, and nation.</b>	<b>3 - Culture For The Future</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>3.1.1</b> Deliver improved and expanded grant and funding programs to support changing community and sector needs, and seed and scale new and growing organizations</li> <li>• <b>3.2.1</b> Develop and collect robust cultural research and data on the value and impact of the sector</li> </ul> <b>4 - Culture Beyond Our Borders</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>4.1.2</b> Foster partnerships with large-scale events to offer cultural experiences and programming to drive local, regional, and international cultural tourism</li> <li>• <b>4.2.2</b> Convene national and international partnerships to advance sector development</li> </ul>	<b>Action 65</b> of the Economic Development Plan, <b>“Enhance Toronto’s international brand as a globally recognized destination to visit and attract investment by executing coordinated campaigns”</b>
<b>3.2</b> <b>Be a leader in environmental sustainability.</b>	<b>3 - Culture For The Future</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>3.1.4</b> Advance sustainable development and the fight against climate change through culture</li> </ul>	The City’s <b>TransformTO Net Zero Strategy</b> has one of the most ambitious targets in North America (to reduce community-wide greenhouse gas emissions in Toronto to net zero by 2040), aligning with the transition plan for TO Live venues.
<b>3.3</b> <b>Ensure financial stability.</b>	n/a	

**Table 2: Values and Principles Alignments**

TO Live Strategic Plan Values	Alignment with Culture Plan Guiding Principles
<b>Diversity and Inclusion:</b> We foster a sense of belonging in everything we do. We strive to be an anti-racist organization.	<b>Principle 1:</b> Centre Indigenous Culture and Creativity <b>Principle 2:</b> Prioritize Equity and Access
<b>Innovative:</b> We are unafraid to experiment and to push the boundaries of creativity.	<b>Principle 3:</b> Champion Artists, Creatives, and Creative Industries <b>Principle 5:</b> Foster Innovation and Enable Creativity
<b>Excellence:</b> We strive to be the best in class in all we do.	
<b>Accountability:</b> We value responsibility and take ownership of our work and actions.	
<b>Adaptable:</b> We see opportunity in embracing our changing world.	<b>Principle 5:</b> Foster Innovation and Enable Creativity
<b>Community Minded:</b> We listen to and are responsive to the people and groups we serve.	<b>Principle 2:</b> Prioritize Equity and Access <b>Principle 4:</b> Attract and Build for Audiences

Both the Culture Plan and TO Live’s Strategic Plan share strong values and guiding principles that ground all short- and long-term goals. Both documents are forward-thinking and community-focused, with these shared tenets woven throughout. All of the Culture Plan Guiding Principles relate to one or more of the Values outlined in the TO Live Strategic Plan. The only variance being where TO Live provides some additional detail around accountability, ownership, and specificity in regards to anti-racism. The Culture Plan states Indigenous culture and creativity as a standalone priority from its broader equity principle.

## Detailed Analysis

Below is a detailed analysis of how each of the TO Live Strategic Plan pillars aligns with the City Culture Plan and other city priorities. Under each pillar, we have included the following:

- Specific TO Live examples that align with the Culture Plan are identified with a ➔ symbol.
- Specific TO Live alignments with other Toronto plans or initiatives are marked with a ★ symbol.

## TO Live Pillar 1: Creative Community Hubs

**Goal:** *To serve Toronto's communities as an anchor cultural institution*

- TO Live aims to make its venues vibrant, welcoming community hubs, focusing on inclusivity, community engagement, and cultural innovation. They will act as key anchors of the city, contributing meaningfully to Toronto's cultural scene and economic recovery.

How the *Objectives* under this Pillar align with the Culture Plan and other Toronto plans or initiatives:

### **TO Live Objective 1.1: Transform our venues into welcoming hubs daytime and nighttime, seven days a week**

This strategy involves new and innovative ways to use existing spaces within TO Live's venues and expanding its availability for community use.

#### **Culture Plan Alignment: *Expanding access to spaces***

Objective 1.1 has strong links to the Culture Plan's **Priority 1: Culture Everywhere**, which shares the same goals around developing new and expanding spaces for culture in the city (*from the Culture Plan: 1.1: Develop new spaces and places for culture throughout the city; 1.2: Expand the use of and protect existing cultural spaces*).

- **TO Live's "Making Space" program** offers subsidized or free access to TO Live's facilities for artists and arts organizations<sup>4</sup>. This helps to achieve the Culture Plan's action regarding protecting and expanding existing spaces for culture to combat the displacement of creatives and industry in Toronto.
- Over the pandemic, TO Live also provided spaces for artists and organizations to film and live stream content<sup>5</sup>. This expanded the variety of functions that TO Live offers to the arts and culture community, opening these City-owned spaces for both short- and long-term cultural uses.
- ★ **Action 18** of the Economic Development Plan, "**Create space for inclusive entrepreneurship**" includes providing low-cost space for business startups, to create an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem that supports underrepresented groups, which could include the arts and culture industry.

## **TO Live Objective 1.2 Position TO Live venues as go-to places for cultural entertainment for locals and visitors to Toronto.**

### **Culture Plan Alignment: : Diversity of programming**

TO Live aims to program a diverse range of shows, including local, national, and international performances, aligning with the Culture Plan's **Priority 4: Culture Beyond Our Borders**. By showcasing talent from different backgrounds and cultures, TO Live not only positions its venues for entertainment for locals, but sets up Toronto globally as a creative capital. This directly executes the Culture Plan's objectives around promoting and advancing Toronto talent and industry at all scales (*from the Culture Plan: 4.1: Promote and advance Toronto talent and industry, locally, nationally, and internationally*).

- Within TO Live's three venues, there are unique offerings at each one, representing an **ecosystem approach** that serves art forms in specialized ways. Through this diversity of space, TO Live is delivering not only dance, music, theatre, circus, and visual art, but also to the community. Their venues are often used for graduations, dance school competitions, film festivals, cultural celebrations, tech conferences, corporate AGMs, and a comprehensive slate of community-oriented programming. These partnerships are encouraged in the Culture Plan. To illustrate this, here is a sample of the diversity of stages and halls that each offer something unique:
  - The Bluma Appel Theatre in the STLC for the Arts is one of the best stages for theatre and dance due to its depth of stage and the size of the wings;

---

<sup>4</sup> TO Live's 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023 impact reports

<sup>5</sup> TO Live 2020 impact report

- The George Weston Recital Hall at Meridian Arts Centre has excellent acoustics well-suited for all genres of music;
- Meridian Hall, as the largest soft-seat theatre in Canada, offers ideal sightlines and acoustics, but is optimal for popular artists (both international and Canadian) due to its 3,000+ seat offering.
- ➔ TO Live highlights both hyper-local and international talent. Two (of many) examples to illustrate this:
  - At the local scale, TO Live presented **Metamorphosis: A Viral Trilogy** in 2020, a project created local Toronto novelist André Alexis<sup>6</sup>.
  - At the international scale, TO Live provided support for **DopoLavoro Teatrale (DLT)** in 2020, an Italian-Canadian company to create **The Spectators' Odyssey o dell'Inferno**<sup>7</sup>. It featured both Italian and Canadian artists and leveraged TO Live's **Provision of Space** initiative by supporting two extended residences for DLT. The Culture Plan echoes this through its action around international reach (*4.1.1 Bring the world to Toronto and Toronto to the world through international residences, creative exchange, and exhibition opportunities*).
- ★ **Action 28** of the Economic Development Plan, "**Attract major international events and audiences**" includes enhancing Toronto's capacity to host and incubate international events. As much of TO Live's programming includes partnerships outside of Toronto (and sometimes Canada), TO Live is already nurturing strong global relationships and a presence as local Toronto hosts for diverse arts and culture events.

## Culture Plan Alignment: *Location of venues in Toronto and audience reach*

The positioning of TO Live's venues across Toronto - both in the Downtown core (Meridian Hall and St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts) and in North York (Meridian Arts Centre) - makes the organization well-positioned to serve both locals and visitors due to its accessibility and transit proximity. This helps promote the spirit of arts and culture within these neighbourhoods, as the Culture Plan also recommends as a mid-term action (*from the Culture Plan: 1.2.3 Develop tools to protect and strengthen cultural districts across the City*). This reference to "cultural districts" aligns with additional City priorities:

- ★ The **TOcore Downtown Plan** identifies the King-Parliament neighbourhood as an important "**Cultural Precinct**" hub for creative industries and the cultural sector, highlighting in policy the need to strengthen these clusters<sup>8</sup>. Both Meridian Hall and St. Lawrence for the Arts are important anchors in this cultural precinct.

---

<sup>6</sup> TO Live 2020 Impact Report

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.tolive.com/Story-Detail-Page/reference/Media-Release-%E2%80%94-The-Spectators-2021>

<sup>8</sup> TOcore Downtown Plan, Map 41-14 - Cultural Corridors and King-Spadina and King-Parliament Cultural Precincts

- ★ The Economic Development Plan acknowledges the importance of strong main streets as vital anchors for community activity. Although it focuses primarily on supporting smaller businesses, the function of Yonge Street as a key corridor throughout the City and its proximity (or direct adjacency to) all of TO Live's venues highlight how important all three act as anchors for community activity.

## TO Live Objective 1.3 Establish TO Live as a pillar organization for cultural engagement.

This objective is rooted in the understanding that TO Live holds a unique position to facilitate meaningful connections between artists, audiences, and communities. This includes establishing connections with diverse communities, working collaboratively with partners to expand its reach and diversify its programming, and committing to engagement and social responsibility.

### Culture Plan Alignment: *Building strong partnerships with community*

One of TO Live's most significant accomplishments as a leading cultural institution in Toronto lies within its ability to foster strong partnerships. This directly aligns with the Culture Plan's **Priority 2: Culture for All** and **Priority 3: Culture for The Future**, specifically citing objectives around partnerships (*from the Culture Plan: 2.3: Build and strengthen community and partnerships*) and relationships with public and private funders (*from the Culture Plan: 3.1: Advance sector sustainability, and work with public and private funders to support adaptability and collaboration among cultural organizations*).

- TO Live highlights its partnerships with community organizations, specifically with those serving Indigenous, Black, and equity-deserving communities. Some examples include partnerships with **Black Artists' Networks in Dialogue (BAND)** and **North York Arts** that amplify underrepresented voices and celebrate cultural diversity<sup>9</sup>.
- Events like **Doors Open Toronto** invite the community to explore TO Live's venues and learn about their cultural significance in the city<sup>10</sup>.
- Partnerships with organizations like **VIBE Arts NExT (Network and Explore Together) Mentorship Exhibit**, which highlights TO Live's commitment to nurturing young talents and encourages artistic growth within the community<sup>11</sup>. With a new cohort of young artists every year, this partnership builds, connects, and strengthens networks of Black artists throughout the GTA.

---

<sup>9</sup> TO Live 2023 Impact Report

<sup>10</sup> <https://tolive.com/Doors-Open>

<sup>11</sup> <https://tolive.com/Vibe-Arts>

This goes both ways as well, with generous philanthropic contributions from the donor community that believe strongly in TO Live's mission and the programming or support it contributes to the arts and culture sector in Toronto.

- ★ TO Live's focus on highlighting both local and international talent also aligns with the Economic Development Plan, which highlights the creative industries as one of Toronto's "globally competitive sectors" that drives productivity and accounts for 36% of the city's jobs.

## TO Live Pillar 2: Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access

TO Live's commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity, and access is clear across all of its objectives, programming, partnerships, and the way it operates.

How the *Objectives* under this Pillar align with the Culture Plan and other Toronto plans or initiatives:

### TO Live Objective 2.1: Ensure TO Live is accessible to all Torontonians.

This objective focuses on accessibility, and TO Live delivers this on multiple fronts, not just increasing physical accessibility, but also promoting arts and culture through visibility, financial, marketing, and high media coverage. This directly echoes the Culture Plan's **Priority 2: Culture For All**.

#### Culture Plan Alignment: : *Increasing access to programming*

TO Live ensures that all Torontonians (and residents of surrounding communities too) can access cultural programming. Not only does this touch on the Culture Plan's guiding principle about prioritizing equity and access, but directly to these Culture Plan's actions around distributing resources (*from the Culture Plan: 2.1.1: Improve the distribution of the City's cultural funding and other resources, with a focus on deepening support to Indigenous, Black, and equity-deserving communities, and communities outside the downtown core*).

- TO Live mentions providing **free and reduced-price tickets** and access to individuals and communities that may not otherwise have access to programming. This directly tackles financial barriers, making TO Live's programming more accessible to a wider range of people. This is aligned with the Culture Plan's target of "*Every resident will have access to at least one free cultural experience in their neighbourhood supported by the City each month.*"
- TO Live's **communities and outreach initiative** provides platforms to more vulnerable populations and neighbourhoods. Some examples include:
  - Their Arts and Wellness series helps to create accessible and inclusive artistic events, curating them to **seniors and people living with Parkinson's disease**, providing opportunities to mitigate effects of social isolation and promoting creative self-expression.

- Their Arts and Wellness series also focuses on **neurodiverse and differently-abled populations** who may face systemic or social barriers to inclusion
- ➔ TO Live has a deep focus on programming curated to **younger audiences** as well. They provide access to schools to engage with the arts from a very young age through free concerts or subsidized tickets, conduct masterclasses and workshops with visiting artists for schools, host summer camps, and provide a space for curious kids to engage with artists directly to get a behind-the-scenes look of what goes into the making of a stage production.

## Culture Plan Alignment: *Increasing physical access*

It's critical that arts and culture venues promote physical access and empowerment of folks of all ages and abilities to use, frequent, and enjoy TO Live's venues. The Culture Plan echoes this (*from the Culture Plan: 2.2.4 Prioritize greater access and accessibility for cultural venues, events and programs*).

- ➔ TO Live has completed over **\$13 million in capital improvements** to Meridian Hall and Meridian Arts Centre to make venues more accessible and welcoming<sup>12</sup>.
- ★ The TOcore Downtown plan emphasizes the development of **complete communities that are accessible** and provide a range of amenities. This encourages a Downtown that continues to be liveable for all, regardless of ability.

## Culture Plan Alignment: *Increasing visibility*

The visibility of programming through strategic marketing (advertising, promotion, etc.) will also allow and encourage more people to participate, engage, and attend TO Live's programming. This is one of the Culture Plan's main focuses under "Culture for All" (*from the Culture Plan: 2.2.4 Prioritize greater access and accessibility for cultural venues, events, and programs*). TO Live is dedicated to this through its strategic plan but also through recent initiatives and actions to improve artist/show discoverability.

- ➔ TO Live's many **partnerships (Black Artists' Networks in Dialogue, North York Arts, VIBE Arts, etc.)** involves cross-promotion or shared marketing efforts, exposing TO Live to new audiences - locally and internationally.
- ➔ TO Live's participation in City-wide events like **Doors Open** offers opportunities for direct community interaction, raising awareness of TO Live's offerings.

---

<sup>12</sup> TO Live impact reporting 2023

- The annual **impact reports** serve as a platform for TO Live to highlight its contributions to the arts community, demonstrating its value and creating compelling narratives that can attract attention and generate interest.
- Frequent **media attention** for key shows help with the marketing of TO Live's programming. For example, Toronto Star has reviewed shows like Mark Morris Dance Group's "The Look of Love" and Compañía Nacional de Danza's "Carmen". This contributes to visibility and generates interest among potential audiences as well.

## **TO Live Objective 2.2: Represent the diversity of Toronto on our stages, through our partnerships, and across the organization.**

TO Live's dedication to supporting and promoting artists from diverse backgrounds and artistic practices occurs across all scales, permeating through partnerships, programming, and within the organization itself and how it supports the broader arts and culture industry. This objective is in alignment with the Culture Plan's **Priority 2: Culture For All** and **Priority 3: Culture for the Future**.

### **Culture Plan Alignment: Advancing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Arts and Culture industry**

TO Live is dedicated to increasing access for artists and smaller companies to utilize their spaces and resources. This helps to address the risk of losing affordable and accessible cultural spaces throughout the city, as encouraged in the Culture Plan (*from the Culture Plan: 1.2.1 Protect and expand existing spaces for culture to combat the displacement of creatives and industry in Toronto; 1.2.2. Open City- and privately-owned spaces of short- and long-term cultural uses*).

- TO Live's **Making Space Program** offers rehearsal space for free to Toronto based artists and arts organizations. The program is public facing and anyone can apply to use TO Live's spaces, with artist residencies and production assistance also available. This program will be expanded in 2025.
- In 2023, TO Live launched a new, three-tier **mentorship program** to support the professional development and recruitment of BIPOC workers in live entertainment production. This program is curated to youth, student, and early career professionals, providing practical experience through career days and internship opportunities. This is aligned with the Culture Plan's focus on education and training (*3.3.2 Propel development and growth of creatives, organizations, and sectors through training, mentorship, upskilling, knowledge sharing, and gathering; and 3.3.3 Provide education, training and mentorship opportunities for creatives and organizations to grow and develop programs, services, spaces and original Intellectual Property*).

- ★ TO Live's mentorship and Making Space program both directly address the **Confronting Anti-Black Racism Action Plan's** recommendations to increase employment and training opportunities for Black Torontonians in various sectors.

## Culture Plan Alignment: Amplifying Indigenous Voices

Through programming and events, TO Live increasingly centers Indigenous voices. This is also a key value of the Culture Plan (*from the Culture Plan: Guiding Principle 1: Centre Indigenous Culture and Creativity*). A few examples of this in TO Live's reporting and how it aligns with other City priorities are below:

- The **UpFRONT Festival** in 2024 was a dedicated platform for showcasing Indigenous arts and culture. It was a 3-day long celebration of music, comedy, puppetry, workshops, and more, using various stages, outdoor spaces, and online platforms (like Youtube) to feature various artists and performers<sup>13</sup>.
- Various TO Live **videos**<sup>14</sup> and **articles** highlight and promote a diverse range of artists, including Indigenous artists like Drezus and Shawnee Kish, and artists working in various disciplines like puppetry (Ronnie Burkett), dance (Hannah Alissa Richardson and Lukas McFarlane), and music (Celeigh Cardinal).
- TO Live also collaborates with initiatives like the **Paprika Theatre Festival's Indigenous Arts Program** which highlight emerging artists and support the development of new works that reflect diverse perspectives.
- ★ The **Reconciliation Action Plan** outlines several actions that directly relate to arts and culture, which could align with what TO Live has been doing to amplify and honour Indigenous Voices through its programming and events. The Reconciliation Action Plan includes:
  - **Action 16: Celebrate Indigenous Arts and Culture**, which includes a commitment to support First Nations, Inuit and Métis artists, youth, and arts and culture organizations by providing funding and space needed to enhance the visibility of Indigenous Peoples in Toronto through the proliferation of arts and culture. It also mentions the support of Indigenous festivals and events in the city throughout the year.
  - **Action 20: Improve Indigenous Economic Development**, which includes a commitment to build relationships and partner with Indigenous organizations that support Indigenous community members with employment.
- ★ **Action 5** of the Economic Development Plan, "**Advance Indigenous Economic Development**," requires considering the unique needs of Indigenous communities, organizations, and businesses to thrive in Toronto. This could include Indigenous artists and small businesses/companies that TO Live has provided a platform for and built a relationship with.

---

<sup>13</sup> <https://tolive.com/upfront-festival-2024>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/@TOLiveTube/videos>

### TO Live Objective 2.3: Embody the principles of equity and inclusion in TO Live culture.

The principles of equity and inclusion should go deeper than just through programming and events TO Live offers, but also through “walking the talk” within its organization as well. It’s important that TO Live becomes an employer of choice reflective of the diversity of Toronto. Employment is an important action in the Culture Plan, specifically under Objective 3.3 *Expand pathways to employment in culture and the creative industries*.

#### Culture Plan Alignment: *Organizational commitment*

TO Live’s IDEA Committee is an employee-led project designed to provide an ongoing platform for employee voices and support bringing inclusion, diversity, equity, and access into every area of the workplace. In the Committee’s Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) Action Plan, released in 2021, a number of these actions relate to the goals of the Culture Plan. A few highlights include:

- **Goal 1 of the IDEA Action Plan** is to identify and address systemic barriers affecting full participation at TO Live.
- **Goal 2 of the IDEA Action Plan** is to ensure our policies and procedures meet our employees’ needs and that employees feel safe and a sense of belonging.
- **Goal 3 of the IDEA Action Plan** is to build a more diverse organization through recruitment, retention and advancement initiatives. The Culture Plan speaks to this through its Action around reducing barriers in employment (3.3.1 *Work with employment, newcomer services and settlement agencies to reduce barriers to employment in cultural sectors and creative industries*).
- In the 2021-2022 impact reporting, a specific **Employee Resource Group (ERG)** was created for employees from Asia, Asian ancestry, and for those interested in Asian culture.
- ★ The Economic Development Plan identifies "**economic polarization**" as a major challenge facing Toronto. The report advocates for policies and programs to ensure that the benefits of economic growth are shared more equitably among residents, including supporting opportunities for "Indigenous, Black, and equity-deserving communities."
- ★ TO Live's focus on dismantling systemic barriers aligns with the **Reconciliation Action Plan's** values of decolonization and power-shifting, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable cultural landscape for Indigenous communities.
- ★ The **Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism** calls for increased representation of Black individuals in leadership and decision-making roles across City institutions, including those involved in arts and culture

## TO Live Pillar 3: Sustainability and Environmental Impact

A focus on the sustainability and environmental impact of TO Live is paramount, as per the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan. Part of making a positive contribution to the city's identity and progress includes ensuring that the organization makes financially and environmentally sustainable decisions.

How the Objectives under this Pillar align with the Culture Plan and other Toronto plans or initiatives:

### TO Live Objective 3.1: Showcase the economic and artistic impact of TO Live to the city of Toronto, province, and nation.

#### Culture Plan Alignment: *Annual impact reporting*

- **Impact reporting** from TO Live helps to showcase the economic and artistic impact of TO Live, aligning with the Culture Plan's similar urgent action (*from the Culture Plan: 3.2.1 Develop and collect robust cultural research and data on the value and impact of the sector*). As a critical anchor in Toronto's arts and culture scene, TO Live's consistent reporting helps to tell the story of culture through robust research and data, gathering feedback and stories of impact of cultural experiences.

#### Culture Plan Alignment: *International presence*

- **International events** that bring thousands of Toronto residents and visitors to TO Live's venues show that TO Live has established itself strongly as a magnet that attracts major international events and audiences. This aligns with the Culture Plan's urgent action around continued partnerships (*from the Culture Plan: 4.1.2 Foster partnerships with large-scale events to offer cultural experiences and programming to drive local, regional, and international cultural tourism; and 4.2.2 Convene national and international partnerships to advance sector development*).
- ★ **Action 65** of the Economic Development Plan, "**Enhance Toronto's international brand as a globally recognized destination to visit and attract investment by executing coordinated campaigns**" could include arts and culture pro w

## **TO Live Objective 3.2: Be a leader in environmental sustainability.**

The Culture Plan explicitly cites the climate crisis as a driver that shapes culture in Toronto today. Specifically, it recognizes that many artists, cultural organizations and creative industries are deeply connected to environmental issues as part of their work.

### **Culture Plan Alignment: *Net Zero***

- Based on an item adopted by the Board of Directors of TO Live on June 20, 2024, all three TO Live venue buildings have a goal to be **net zero** by 2040 (as per TO Live's Net Zero Transition Program, which includes a transition plan and approach<sup>15</sup>). This aligns with the Culture Plan's action 3.1.4 Advance sustainable development and the fight against climate change through culture.
- This also aligns with the City's TransformTO Net Zero Strategy, which has one of the most ambitious targets in North America (to reduce community-wide greenhouse gas emissions in Toronto to net zero by 2040).

---

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2024/ct/bgrd/backgroundfile-246942.pdf>



## **Part 2: How We Can Grow Together**

*How TO Live and the City can help each other*

## Areas of Opportunity: Strengthening the Partnership between TO Live and the City

There is no doubt that there is significant alignment between TO Live's mission and the City of Toronto's cultural goals. **This shared vision creates an important opportunity to strengthen and elevate Toronto as a global arts and cultural destination.** Both organizations have already been delivering on each other's strategic ambition in real, tangible ways - from advancing sustainability, supporting emerging artists, fostering equity and inclusion, and highlighting the diverse cultural experiences across the city.

These synergies and co-benefits between TO Live and the City showcase an existing foundation but also opportunity for deeper collaboration. Whether it's through leveraging TO Live's venues for City-run events like Nuit Blanche, leaning on the City to see how existing cultural districts could grow or where new ones could be created through TO Live's resources, or using each others' marketing and communications platforms to cross-promote programming - there are so many ways where both organizations can strengthen each other's efforts. By coordinating resources, sharing expertise, and working together across departments, agencies, and non-profits, we can create a truly interconnected cultural ecosystem.

We see it as a missed opportunity if both TO Live and the City continue to operate in silos. TO Live has the ability to be a key partner in interdepartmental and inter-agency collaboration. As we look forward, it's clear that both TO Live and the City are aligned in the most important ways. We should build on existing partnerships and forge new relationships where opportunities arise. If we work together strategically and creatively, we can ensure that Toronto remains a thriving, sustainable, and inclusive arts and culture destination for generations to come.

Some high-level recommendations on areas of shared opportunity:

- **Build a Shared Public Narrative:** We see opportunities for TO Live to build stronger connections with the City's cultural ecosystem, from deeper ties to the Economic Development and Culture Division as well as the Toronto Arts Council/Foundation. By working together, TO Live can support and elevate City-led and City-supported initiatives (e.g. Nuit Blanche, Toronto Fringe Festival, Luminato Festival). By formalizing deeper partnerships with the City, TO Live can play a more active role in shaping Toronto's cultural identity. These deepened relationships could enable the creation of a **unified, public-facing narrative** that showcases the partnership between TO Live and the City and its collective impact, and positioning both organizations as key drivers in the City's cultural growth.
- **Showcase the Cultural District:** The plan for the revitalization of the STLC was grounded in the concept of the STLC being a catalyst for a "Cultural District" along Front Street and the surrounding neighbourhood. The **TOcore Downtown Plan** identifies the King-Parliament neighbourhood as an important "**Cultural Precinct**" hub for creative industries and the cultural sector, and highlights the need improve these clusters<sup>16</sup>. Both Meridian Hall and St. Lawrence for the Arts are important anchors within this defined cultural precinct. The proximity of TO Live's venues to Yonge Street, arguably Toronto's most important thoroughfare, also shows how a focus on enhancing your current cultural district aligns with the aspirations of the Economic Development plan as well. **Framing your state of good repair work at the STLC as being a critical component of maintaining the vibrancy of the King-Parliament cultural district** and highlighting how all of your venues contribute to Yonge Street remaining a flourishing main street are important.
- **Engage New Audiences Together:** TO Live and the City should **work together to engage new audiences and expand into underserved neighbourhoods**. While TO Live's venues are key anchors in Toronto's existing cultural districts, there aren't too many opportunities right now to extend its reach to audiences and neighbourhoods that have not traditionally engaged with TO Live's programming. Further, many communities may not even be fully aware of what TO Live is, what their offerings are, or how to access the organization's downtown or uptown venues. There's an opportunity here for TO Live and the City to work together to identify and engage these audiences through intentional outreach or programming. Through our scan of the 2023 ticket data, we found that areas in the east end of Toronto (specifically Scarborough) are underrepresented in TO Live's ticket sales. TO Live can work with the city to expand its presence through satellite venues, partnerships with local Scarborough organizations, or even help to incubate new arts initiatives that bring cultural

---

<sup>16</sup> TOcore Downtown Plan, Map 41-14 - Cultural Corridors and King-Spadina and King-Parliament Cultural Precincts

programming directly to those communities. **This shift could represent a new era for TO Live, transforming it from a primarily venue-based organization into a more dynamic, “spoke-and-wheel” model that reaches across the city - with an intentional focus on underserved communities or communities that have less transit-access.**

These expansions - at whatever scale - should be data-driven, tracking audience engagement and constantly measuring/monitoring the success of these outreach efforts. This can help both the City and TO Live to evaluate how effectively these new audiences are being reached and whether new programming is having the desired impact in underserved communities.

- **Leverage Shared Capacity:** TO Live’s success in building a financially sustainable organization, especially through its robust corporate partnerships and sponsors, presents an opportunity for both the organization and the City to explore potential new avenues for investment in Toronto’s cultural landscape. Any surplus generated by TO Live could be reinvested in support of the City’s Culture Plan for Toronto, ensuring that arts and culture can reach all corners of the city. **A successful TO Live can feed directly into a successful arts and culture landscape in Toronto.** As corporate sponsorships in the arts sector have faced increasing challenges in recent years, TO Live’s expertise in **diversifying its funding streams** could be invaluable in helping the City adapt to this evolving context. By sharing best practices and resources, TO Live can support the City to develop a more resilient business model, opening up **joint opportunities** for increased corporate partnerships, grants, and innovative financing that can support both TO Live and any city-wide cultural initiatives. The City can benefit from TO Live’s extensive networks (locally and internationally), partnerships, and marketing expertise. TO Live’s marketing and communications divisions, as well as audience engagement strategies should be leveraged by the City, so that the City can also amplify the visibility and accessibility of their own cultural initiatives, events, or programming. **Cross-promotional opportunities** (joint campaigns, shared messaging, co-branded events) can enhance the impact and reach of efforts from both organizations. This mutual support will elevate Toronto’s arts and culture scene to new audiences - together augmenting the good work that both TO Live and the City are both doing.