

FUTURE

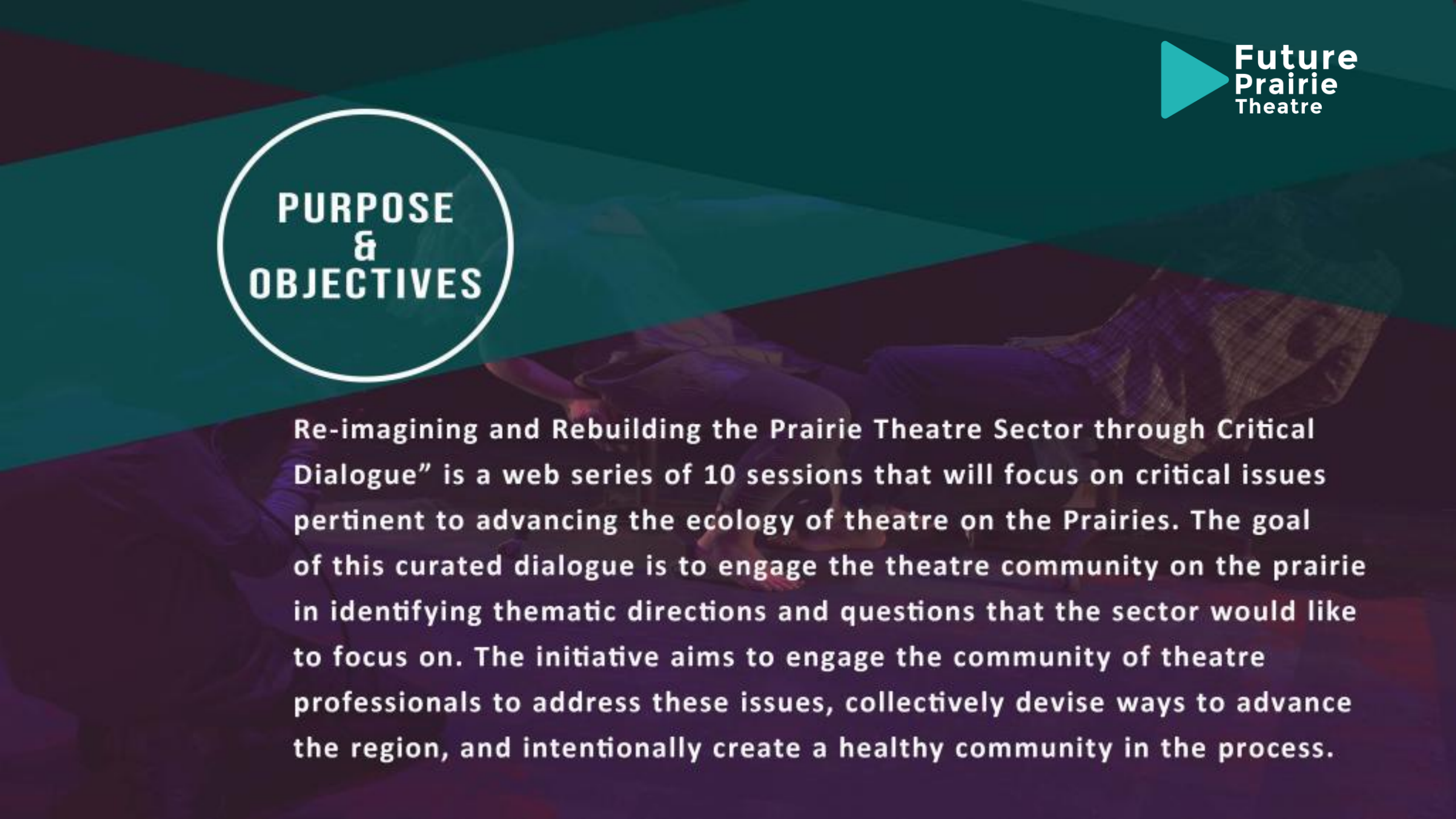
PRAIRIE

THEATRE

PROJECT JOURNAL
Session 1 - 10



**PURPOSE
&
OBJECTIVES**

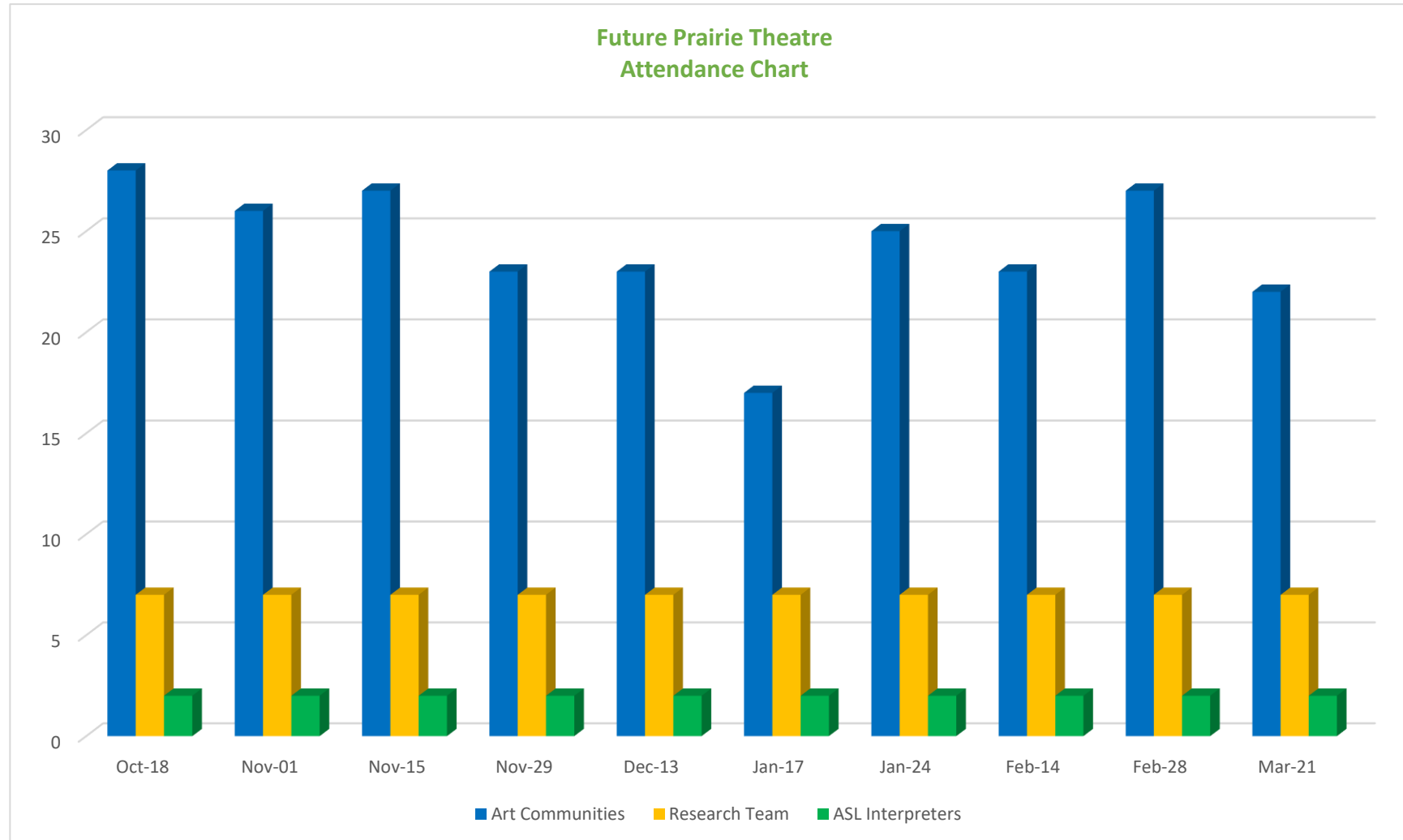


Re-imagining and Rebuilding the Prairie Theatre Sector through Critical Dialogue” is a web series of 10 sessions that will focus on critical issues pertinent to advancing the ecology of theatre on the Prairies. The goal of this curated dialogue is to engage the theatre community on the prairie in identifying thematic directions and questions that the sector would like to focus on. The initiative aims to engage the community of theatre professionals to address these issues, collectively devise ways to advance the region, and intentionally create a healthy community in the process.

Structure of each session

- ❖ Welcoming and accepting participants
- ❖ Introduction
- ❖ Group Change/sorting
- ❖ Breakout I (Questions and Responses)
- ❖ General Panel
- ❖ Break
- ❖ Breakout II (Questions and Responses)
- ❖ General Panel and Conclusion

ATTENDANCE (SESSION 1-10)



FRAMING TOOLS



For meetings between participants and research teams



Jamboard

To collate ideas from participants and researchers



To collate ideas from participants and researchers



For note taking by the research team

SESSION 1

(OCTOBER 18, 2021)



**LOOKING
BACK
TO
FALL
FORWARD**

MAIN QUESTIONS

- Experiences of being a theatre artist on the Canadian Prairie.
- Preferred issues to be addressed in the theatre sector on the prairies to address?”
- What the barriers currently faced that impacts ability to participate?”
- “What is the representation in your community and are those interactions recognized across abilities and identities?”
- Ways to make theatre more accessible across socioeconomic backgrounds?”
- Concerns and Excitement about the future of the theatre sector on the prairie
- How the lens of Justice, equity, diversity and inclusion can be useful for envisioning the prairie theatre sector?

CHALLENGES / PAIN POINTS

- Lack of density in the prairies in comparison to the major art centers, decreases the deep engagement on a day to day basis with the communities.
- Open-gendered casting approaches
- Fears that the theatre sector is unsustainable, unprepared for the future, or that tomorrow's artists will be working under the same oppressive/scarce conditions of today.
- JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion) is the key and a gift to dismantle colonial systems, colonial theatre, and the colonial impacts in the theatre
- There are concerns about socioeconomic barriers when we are focused on JEDI,
- Lack of flexibility from the funders compared to theatre organizations and artists
- Politics on the prairies is scary in terms of voting as it is socially leaning towards conservatism
- Aside from the lack of resources, there are also concerns regarding nepotism, “the show must go on” notion where people are reluctant to teach or be inclusive.

NEEDS AND DESIRES

- Diversity, inclusion and representation are immensely meaningful despite it sounding like a chant.
- We do not want to replace anyone, we just want to be included”.
- Reconciling the settler stories with indigeneity, raising the question of how do we approach those deep roots of trauma nationwide through theatre?
- Need to enhance our capacity to provide and receive healthy critique of our work and our processes



POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- Cultivating diverse theatre-makers also entails cultivating diverse audiences
- Support network for 'political orphans': folks alienated from their families and/or networks by gender or racial politics'
- Affirmative action should take place as it would create more paths for individuals who are not well established.
- Push for deep, uncomfortable, systemic change, not settle for surface changes; authentic.
- Expand capacity in order to support people to create their art and express themselves in ways they can
- We must focus on the most vulnerable among us
- We need to offer 'business' skill-building opportunities, e.g. grant writing, contracts, etc.

DREAM SCENARIOS

- Values will be great in the future, if artists and companies are free and are encouraged to articulate values and budget for them.
- How can theatres entice/make it possible for staff and artists to stay?
- Re-imagine our seasons and work hours to offer a sustainable work environment?
- imagine if companies/theatres were encouraged/expected to state their values up front and budget accordingly -- putting the money where the values are.

OPPORTUNITIES

- The opportunities in the prairies to move forward are very tight knit compared to cities like Toronto; opportunities are very limited unless the individual is well established.
- One great aspect and value of being on the prairies is being able to work with a diverse set of individuals due to the communities being small enough to have a deeper connection
- The pandemic has made it pretty easy to access accessibility needs

SESSION 2

(NOVEMBER 1, 2021)



**RETENTION
ON
THE
PRAIRIE**

MAIN QUESTIONS

- What are the conditions that will result in people staying on the prairie?
- Is it easier to be a BIPOC or Queer elsewhere
- What are the conditions that will result in people staying to work in theatre on the prairie

PERSONAL STORY / CONTEXT

- One major thing that would make individuals stay is if the political environment changes.
- Some individuals said that they spent quite a lot of time on the prairies due to having their training, developed theatre companies which makes them stay
- Some individuals on the contrary tried to leave and live in big cities and couldn't make it happen or work.
- Some individuals came to the Prairies due to access to funding which they didn't have in the big cities.

CHALLENGES / PAIN POINTS

- One of the conditions that make individuals stay on the prairies is the roots they have which are deep in the land and the people they are connected to
- The spaces that exist are not welcoming to a variety of individuals and even in the community that they are in is often in places like downtown.

NEEDS AND DESIRES

- Mentorship and access to mentors
- Being able to engage as many people and scenarios in order to have better representation on stage and for audiences.



POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- There needs to be a political shift, the political environment on the prairies is not very welcoming, and very conservative
- More funding for the arts and having more skills in order to apply for grants
- Give individuals middle level opportunities so they can work and grow instead of picking one theatre company

OPPORTUNITIES

- Opportunities must be greater and magical on the prairies in order for individuals to stay.

SESSION 3

(NOVEMBER 15, 2021)

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a grey long-sleeved dress and a headpiece with a circular element, stands in a museum. She is looking to her right. The background is dark with some light-colored panels. A black-bordered box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the text 'PULL OF THE FUTURE' in bold, black, uppercase letters.

**PULL
OF
THE
FUTURE**

MAIN QUESTIONS

- If the community is critical to theatre-making in the prairies, then what is the responsibility in the prairies as individuals?
- If the community is critical to theatre-making, then what is the community collective responsibility?

CHALLENGES / PAIN POINTS

- Grants are largely unavailable to people in the priaries
- There is need for space for new and marginalized artist to share their stories, experiences and wisdom
- The preconception of how theatre should/could be made needs to be challenged
- Scale of work/ venues
- A lot of resources go into fostering early emerging artists (everywhere in Canada) and then there is a huge chasm before anyone is considered established.
- Systemic racism against people of colour
- Telling smaller artiste or theatre companies to do somethings that are above their means before they can get some funding, doesn't make sense. For example, telling a smaller theatre company to make wheelchair access and toilet for disable before she can get funding.

NEEDS AND DESIRES

- To encourage more regional touring and collaboration, it needs to be reflected in our funding bodies.
- More mid-sized venues (and rehearsal spaces) available at attainable price points for operationally smaller companies to access.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- When given the opportunity, advocate for prairie regions on a national level
- Help new theatre artist have access to information, venue options, props, costumes etc
- Reduce the crab theory of pulling other people down when they seem to be making it.
- Demand environmental stewardship
- Everything should be debatable, and not naturalized in the prairies For example, ticket prices don't have to be the same way.
- Established artist need to collaborate with smaller artist, by creating enabling environment to produce works
- Consistently consult the community about new systems and new way of thinking



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SESSION 4

(NOVEMBER 29 2021)

A group of people are sitting on a circular stage, illuminated by a bright spotlight from above. The scene is dimly lit, with the spotlight creating a strong contrast. The people are seen from behind, looking towards the center of the stage. The overall atmosphere is one of focus and anticipation.

**ENVISION
THE
FUTURE**

MAIN QUESTIONS

- In 15-20 years, there is sustained growth/explosion of arts on the prairies. Artists from across the country are choosing to move to both the urban and rural communities in AB, SK and MB because...
- Based on our responses to the first question, what are our present day actions within our own spheres of influence that will get us there? (outside of our sphere of influence)

CHALLENGES / PAIN POINTS

- It is not just about finance and artist but economic and environmental changes
- The question of “how can we exhibit and act on things like landbacks despite it not being a reality?”
- Some individuals don’t have the power to do much within their spheres and when they do some are turned down.

NEEDS AND DESIRES

- The need to reach beyond the borders and provide education for the younger generation.
- Having political leaders who are artists at the same time would be very beneficial for the theatre sector.
- The need to commit to working primarily with the artists within our communities and create more positions for mentoring among others.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- Inviting audience members to the discussion table on the type of theatre they would love to see.
- Being diverse in the theatre sector as people are being suppressed, therefore, opening more platform for those individuals
- Mentorship acts like a bridge and having ongoing opportunities for mentorship would help develop the communities and artist.
- Individuals should build authentic relationships across different communities rather than just being branded.

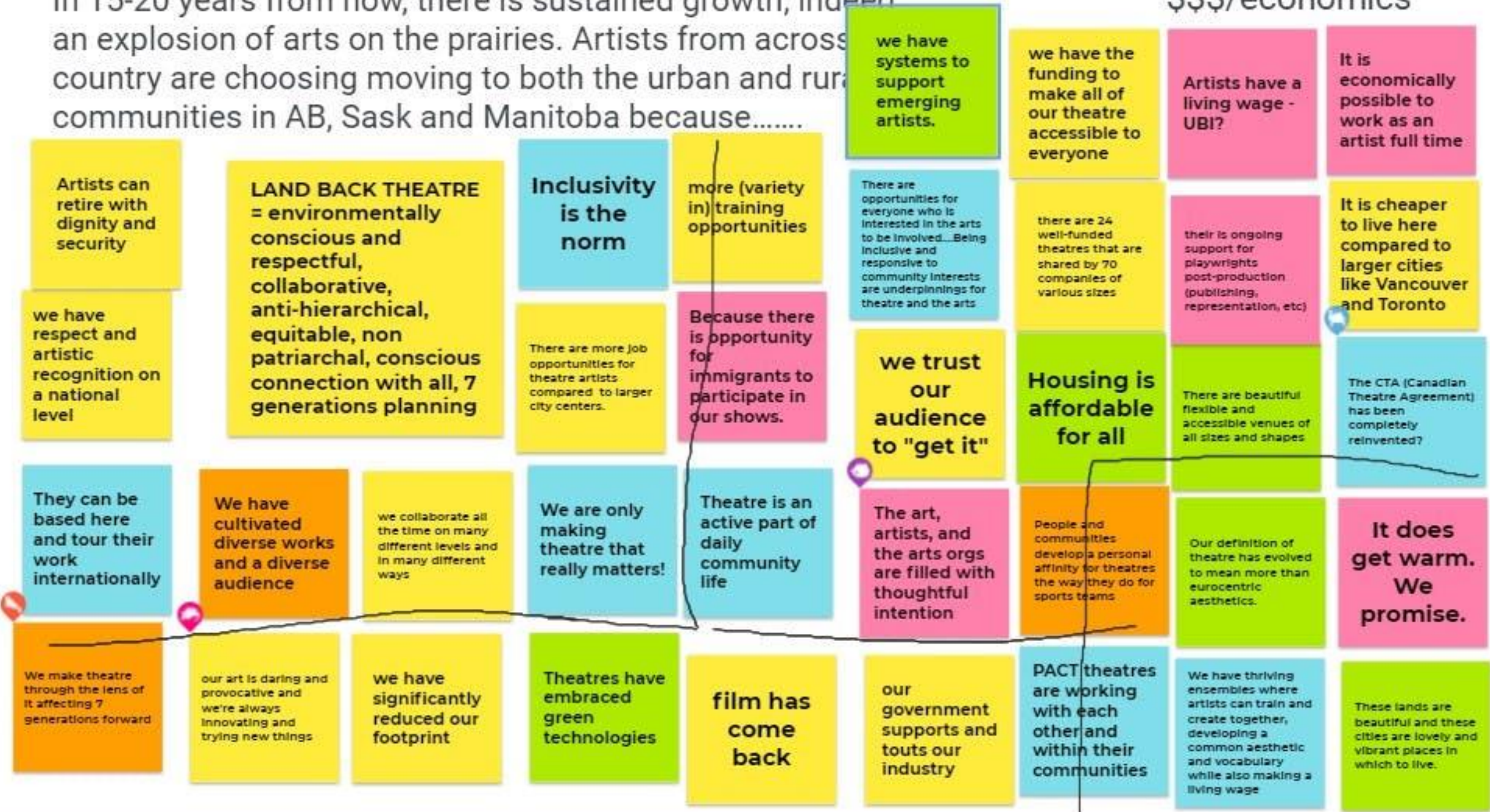
OPPORTUNITIES

ARTISTS WILL MOVE BACK BECAUSE OF THE FOLLOWING

- Respect and artistic recognition on a national level
- Artists can retire with dignity and security
- Diverse works for audience
- More job opportunity compared to larger city centres
- Theatres have embraced green technologies
- Pact theatres are working with each other and in their community

In 15-20 years from now, there is sustained growth, indeed an explosion of arts on the prairies. Artists from across the country are choosing moving to both the urban and rural communities in AB, Sask and Manitoba because.....

\$\$\$/economics



Using the categories, what are our present day actions, within our spheres of influence, that will get us there.



SESSION 5

(DECEMBER 13, 2021)



COMMUNITIES

MAIN QUESTIONS

- What kinds of communities exist with us here in the Prairie context?
Can we name them and thereby acknowledge they exist?
- What learnings and meanings do we derive from the categorization of these communities?



Disabled

Mental illness

Bisexual

Genderqueer

Funders

Calgary

fandoms

Disabled artists/activists

uncoupled human

brain injury survivors

Chinese Community

Online Communities

Sports

comedy and improv

Rider Fans!

book worms

Sports community

PERSONAL STORY / CONTEXT

- Common theme was the perception of community versus the experience of the community. How it is policed both internally and externally.
- There is also an overlap of mental health and addiction community with religion and filtration with other communities.
- We can have the identity but we can't have the agency to choose the identity sometimes, majorly it is put upon us due to many reasons.

CHALLENGES / PAIN POINTS

- Queer context and the pandemic context and how it would differ when finding the community online versus geographically?

NEEDS AND DESIRES

- The destruction of the fourth wall meaning that we cannot perceive the audience as separate from the performers and they would then be welcomed to the community

SESSION 6

(JANUARY 17, 2022)



**MENTORING
PARADIGMS**

MAIN QUESTIONS

- What is mentoring? What does mentoring mean to you?
- What are the existing mentoring paradigms on the prairies?

What is mentoring?



CHALLENGES / PAIN POINTS

- Many participants has had many bad experiences with mentoring
- Mentorship can be used as manipulation techniques
- Mentorship is a risky relationship
- Misunderstanding when it comes to finding mentorship
- Taking mentorship as a marriage proposal when asked to be mentored
- As a mentor it get an overwhelming, and many responsibilities as a mentor or a mentee it has always been reliant on personalities and luck to create a safe space.
- Agency of mentees - how do you decide who will mentor you?how to you seek out/secure mentorship? formally, informally?
- when do you stop being a mentor when its at the detriment of your profession
- how do we measure the success of mentorship programs? quantifying things that aren't really quantifiable



POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- More intentional about creating agreements, and making sure it is a bit more “formal” or structured and so that it is presented in a way for a mentee to also give what they need in that space
- Mentorship and mentee relationship needs to be more formalized and regimented
- Paid mentorship are important
- Expanding mentorship for deaf people in the theatre

SESSION 7

(JANUARY 24, 2022)

ACCESS(BILITY)



MAIN QUESTIONS

- What is access? What it isn't? Prairie-theatre is currently accessible to who? And who gives the access?
- In the year 2042 theatres on the prairies are considered highly accessible to many communities because...

1) What is access? What it isn't? Pump up the Jamboard! 2) Prairie-theatre is currently accessible to who? 3) And who gives the access?



PERSONAL STORY / CONTEXT

- "Access" has many definitions and facets, and different people will think of different aspects of it first. Some may see access as being a discussion of finance, others physical disability, others gatekeeping. None of these answers are wrong, access is simply a broad spectrum of concerns
- I am stuck on who gives access, I wrote administrators, people who run companies. But I think that is just physical access. I think I am neurodivergent, so I think sometimes the art we choose to do can be a barrier

CHALLENGES / PAIN POINTS

- I don't know who grants access, but its easier to think of who takes it away (not even with malicious intent) (physical, or financial - ticket price)
- Granting Access can translate to denial of access. Concerns were raised about opening of doors by others for disabled people.
- Feeling of accessibility being a burden and unwanted
- It becomes exhausting creating access for varied audience during a theatre performance
- How can theatre be made accessible through languages and translations



POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- Work with your community on implementing small steps and commit to continual improvements
- An accessible theatre landscape would have to include good communication and exchange, so that we could serve needs and express needs without major conflict.
- community needs to help in making accessibility easier instead of theatre producers taking all the burden

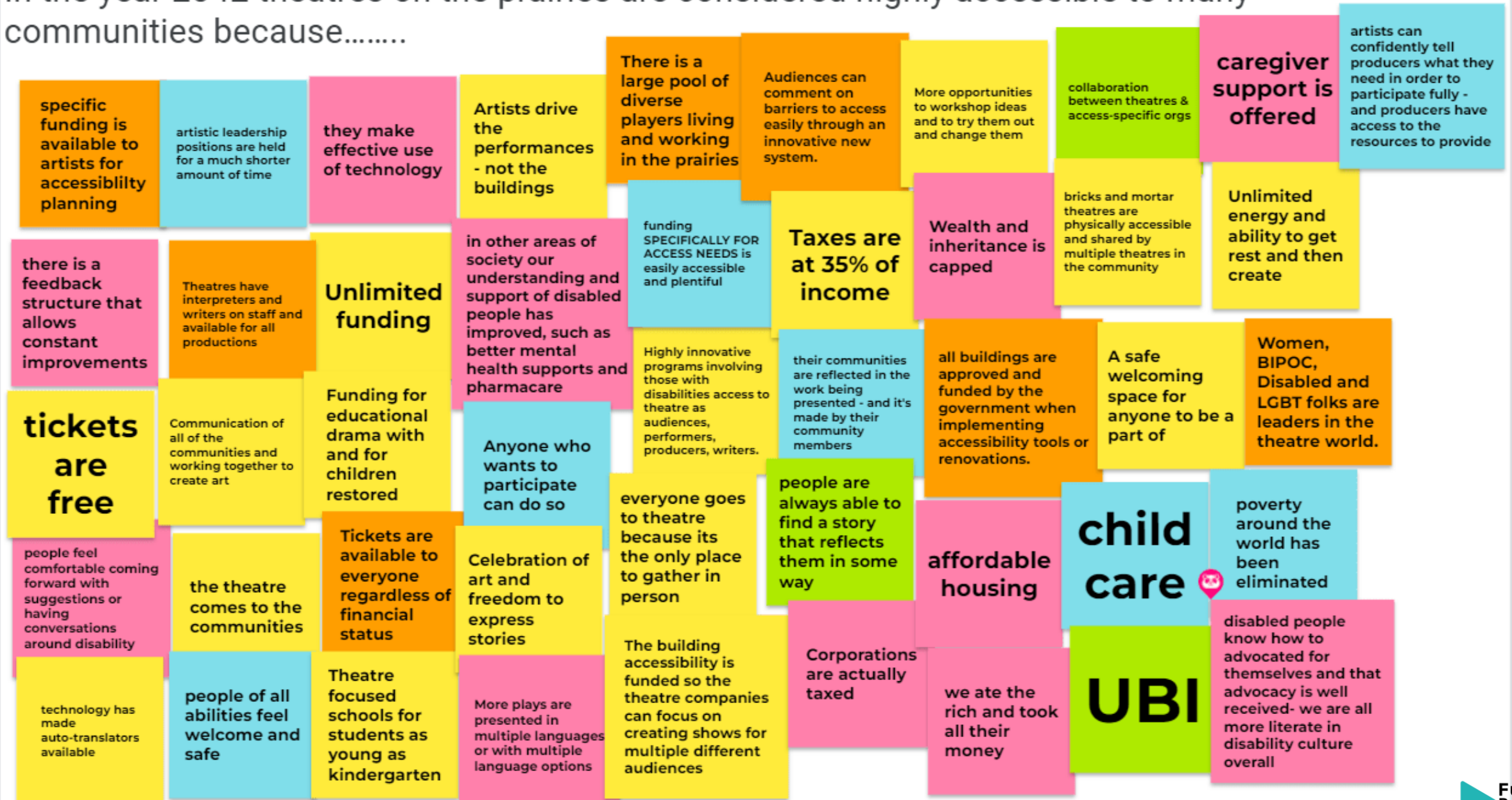
DREAM SCENARIOS

- In a utopia of accessibility, we would have things like a guaranteed income, provided childcare, stable housing, and time to make art.

INSIGHTS / IDEAS

- Create plays incorporating descriptive language into the text, so that a blind or visually impaired person would be able to access the information they needed to enjoy the show without having to take extra measures
- Subtitles at each show/movies/etc representing indigenous nations nearby
- When you realize that you are consciously taking away access, you can start to consider how to make the conscious choice on HOW to take access into consideration
- How impactful is access to a deaf audience, when performance is constantly interpreted to him?

In the year 2042 theatres on the prairies are considered highly accessible to many communities because.....



SESSION 8

(FEBRUARY 14, 2022)

A photograph of two people sitting on office chairs, holding hands and leaning back. The person on the left is wearing a plaid shirt and the person on the right is wearing a patterned dress. They are on a stage with a red and blue patterned rug. The background is dark and out of focus.

**TIME TO
TRANSITION**

MAIN QUESTIONS

- What are your big takeaways from these last seven sessions?
- In what ways can these takeaways inform your current and future choices?

PERSONAL STORY / CONTEXT

- Artists have a lot of interesting viewpoints and platforms like this can help to encapsulate it in a way that is accessible to the greater general public
- Relative homogeneity and conservatism does promote community across differences - but what gets gained, and possibly sacrificed in moving away from that? Our strengths are also our weaknesses
- I am still looking for a way forward that is in active dialogue with our audiences.
- We have great potential to advocate for specific and significant changes on a high level, as a coalition.
- Universal basic income for artist, is one of the great outcomes

What are the big takeaways from these sessions?

what ways can these 'takeaways' inform both your current and future choices?

I am challenged to think beyond the immediate

We have great potential to advocate for specific and significant changes on a high level, as a coalition.

I am still looking for a way forward that is in active dialogue with our audiences.

Visioning the future we want is a first step towards it.

action needs to happen rather than just discussions

how do these translate into action?

how do we make this event a catalyst?

Enacting serious change is a difficult process that goes beyond simply changing culture and ideology.

Artists have a lot of interesting viewpoints and platforms like this can help to encapsulate it in a way that is accessible to the greater general public

we have many common concerns - who is not at these discussions and how do we include their concerns

sharing in the experiences of others broadens your own sense of the creative community and our purpose within it.

walk the walk don't just talk the talk is a good motto

what's the next move?

Relative homogeneity and conservatism does promote community across differences - but what gets gained, and possibly sacrificed in moving away from that? Our strengths are also our weaknesses

My choices as an artist seem already aligned with what others want to see. So I can count on the support of others if I need the extra names to slap onto a letter or application some day.


Are we simply a weaker version of TO, Montreal or Vancouver that will eventually become corrected with more time, money and resources (or not?) Or are we ourselves in a good way that should develop differently

Certain groups, such as Indigenous creators, are already way past being DONE with these discussions and visioning.

what one tactic could these gatherings yield?

SESSION 9

(FEBRUARY 28, 2022)

A group of people are sitting on a circular stage, illuminated by a bright blue spotlight from above. The scene is dimly lit, with the spotlight creating a strong contrast. The people are seen from behind, looking towards the center of the stage.

**FUTURE
SCENARIO
DEVELOPMENT**

SCENARIOS

- **Scenario 1 – Grass Routes:** explores the futures where all identities are visible and celebrated. Land of the theatre is returned to and governed by Indigenous communities
- **Scenario 2 – Care Full:** explores a world where all decisions are made with climate in mind. Everyone has an anxiety disorder
- **Scenario 3 – Things Fall Apart:** things are a bit challenging, there is civil war in Canada, theatre is completely digital and audience is in control and has power over what decisions are made about how theatre happens
- **Scenario 4 – New Bread Basket:** A world where performing art is supported by the state, in this world technology is used a lot, politicians are evolving, and all politicians are under 35 years old

SCENARIO 1 & 2

- **Scenario One (Grass Routes):** In this imagined society, identities are visible and celebrated. A new economic system replaced capitalism and land was returned to Indigenous peoples. Group one chose to explore the lives of a playwright and an audience member in this possible future. For both roles, accessibility was incredibly important. For the playwright, they were financially stable, something that seems rare in our present. In this world, theatre artists feel overwhelmed with responsibility to their communities.
- **Scenario two (Care Full):** The theatre of this world was all about creating with nature- planting trees as theatre, using greenhouses and gardens to feed people as part of the theatre practice. The question that came up was "who is available for work and how is work provided?"

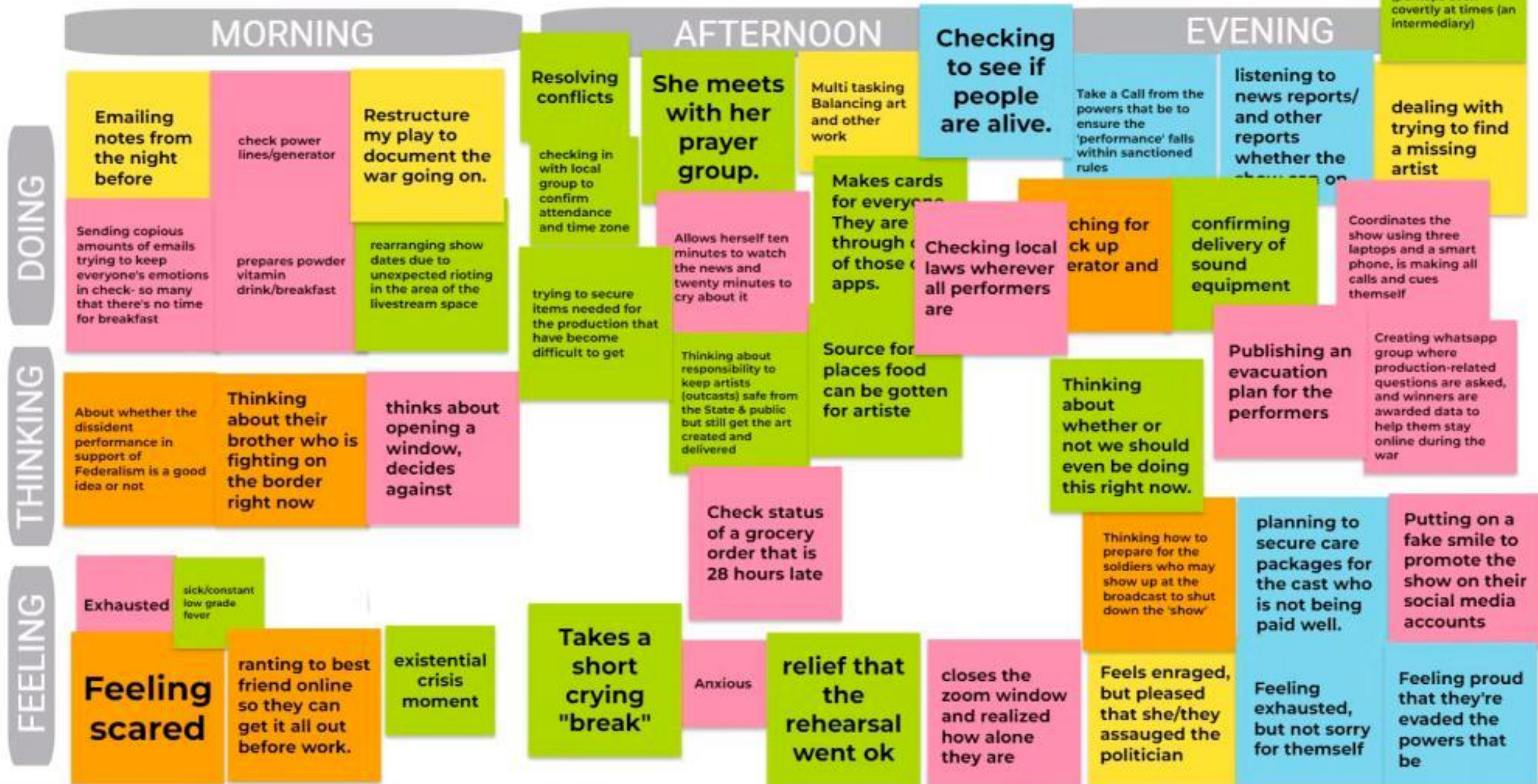
SCENARIO 3 & 4

- **Scenario three (Things Fall Apart):** This group explored a day in the life of a stage manager. They discussed the reality of the present that Stage Managers cannot always reveal where their alliance lies, and perhaps this SM agreed or disagreed with the work being presented. This SM found solace in a religious practice. There was also discussion about how the role of caregiver was expanded. Just as an SM is often now a caregiver, in this scenario it was even more extreme- planning escape routes, finding food, planning backups if the power went out. The world that was described was lonely. The needs of war were always prioritized over the needs of art.
- **Group four (New Bread Basket):** The performing arts are flourishing thanks to government support. This group explored the possibility of having a robot as an artistic director. The community in this future was also more tightly knit as they all had to survive a great drought together. It is a very youth-focused society with a smaller view of longevity. People are very focused on inventing new ways of eating and drinking to save water.

DREAM SCENARIOS

- Artist will meet with the prayer group if civil war breaks out
- Sending copious amounts of emails trying to keep everyone's emotions in check- so many that there's no time for breakfast
- Restructure my play to document the war going on.
- Call from the powers that be to ensure the 'performance' falls within sanctioned rules
- Dealing with trying to find a missing artist
- Rearranging show dates due to unexpected rioting in the area of the livestream space
- Thinking how to prepare for the soldiers who will show up at the broadcast to shut down the 'show'
- Creating whatsapp group where production-related questions are asked, and winners are awarded data to help them stay online during the war
- Productions will be shut down during civil war, so no job for the stage manager
- The stage manager's job shift into finding out if his cast members are alive
- Playwright...loses a draft due to power outage
- Playwright...Start documenting events as they unfold, and people's reaction. I hope the notepad survives the war, and i am alive to turn it into a play

PERSONA #1: Stage Manager



PERSONA #2: _____Playwright_____

MORNING

AFTERNOON

EVENING

DOING

Check with their employer at the med centre to see if there's work today

read the news

Feed the chickens

loses a draft due to power outage

Has run out of all types of coffee and has no form of caffeine. Debating whether chocolate will work or venturing out to the store.

Tries to find a way to contact their mentor.

Works in the garden

having a hard time writing because of intermittent gun shots and explosions

Finishes the script.

Naps

Tunes into an online performance made by friends across the country.

Stays up all night because their mind cannot stop turning

Does other gig. Neighbourhood watch? Translation line? Working at the depot?

Calls their family in all is still the same.

Yells at upstairs neighbour because her prayer group is shouting and chanting

Sends script to primary collaborator. They've made 5 shows together. In 1 week they'll meet on line to have their first crack at the dramaturgy. The play is about what we hold dear.

Doomscrolling, checking the latest safety checks on their friend's pages

Lights a candle and writes in the dark due to power rationing

Goes to work the nightshift

THINKING

Thinking about the sticky plot point they can't untangle from the night before.

Every scenario seems to have occurred somewhere in the real world- what is there to write?

Wishes they were religious cause it might be easier. Wonders about God.

reads inspirational quotes and tries to focus

checks on the elderly neighbours

has insomnia

Start documenting events as they unfold, and people's reaction. I hope the notepad survives the war, and I am alive to turn it into a play

Creates a new innovative formula for scriptwriting

FEELING

feeling depressed

Overwhelm

Writes excessively, but not in a play format, so they feel like a failure

hungry - there has been no fresh fruit or vegetables available

Not knowing who will show up, fretting about what kind of edits to make.

Shouts! Feels empowered by the script.

Feeling both depressed because watching theatre on a phone/ and happy cause the piece was great!

Drinks too much and becomes over-emotional and makes bad editing choices.

Panic set in

SESSION 10

(MARCH 21, 2022)



**2040
DREAM
SCENARIOS**

MAIN QUESTIONS

- Its 2040, and you just found out that domestic air travels have been banned in Canada. What do you do in the first five minutes of finding out. What do you think, say, feel?
- In 2040, I do hope prairie based theatre will...
- In 2040, I do not hope prairie-based theatre will...

It is 2040 and you just found out that domestic air travel has been banned in Canada.

What do you do in the first five minutes of finding out? What do you say? Think? Feel? Use the **sticky notes** to share your thoughts.

The host muted everyone.

Call my mom

This SUCKS!!

Shop around for other

Despair

Make plans for longer delays

Kind of relieved too. No money to fly anymore

Check the news will there be a revolt?

page to keep tab of the situation.

Shock!

Whoops! I love the train so I guess...

friends/family in other cities

Realize I will need to figure out local units for my kids (no more out of province)

Social media check - What up?

Think: Wow, that's the end of that.

Check the buses. Hope they're still running

I mean some people don't fly even now (Bruce Horak; Margaret Atwood) so -- whatever I guess

Call my pals in TO and vent

"I can't die here."

Fear grips in. Wondering if there is going to be a civil war or so

Call my friends in other province to know what the situation is like in their respective province

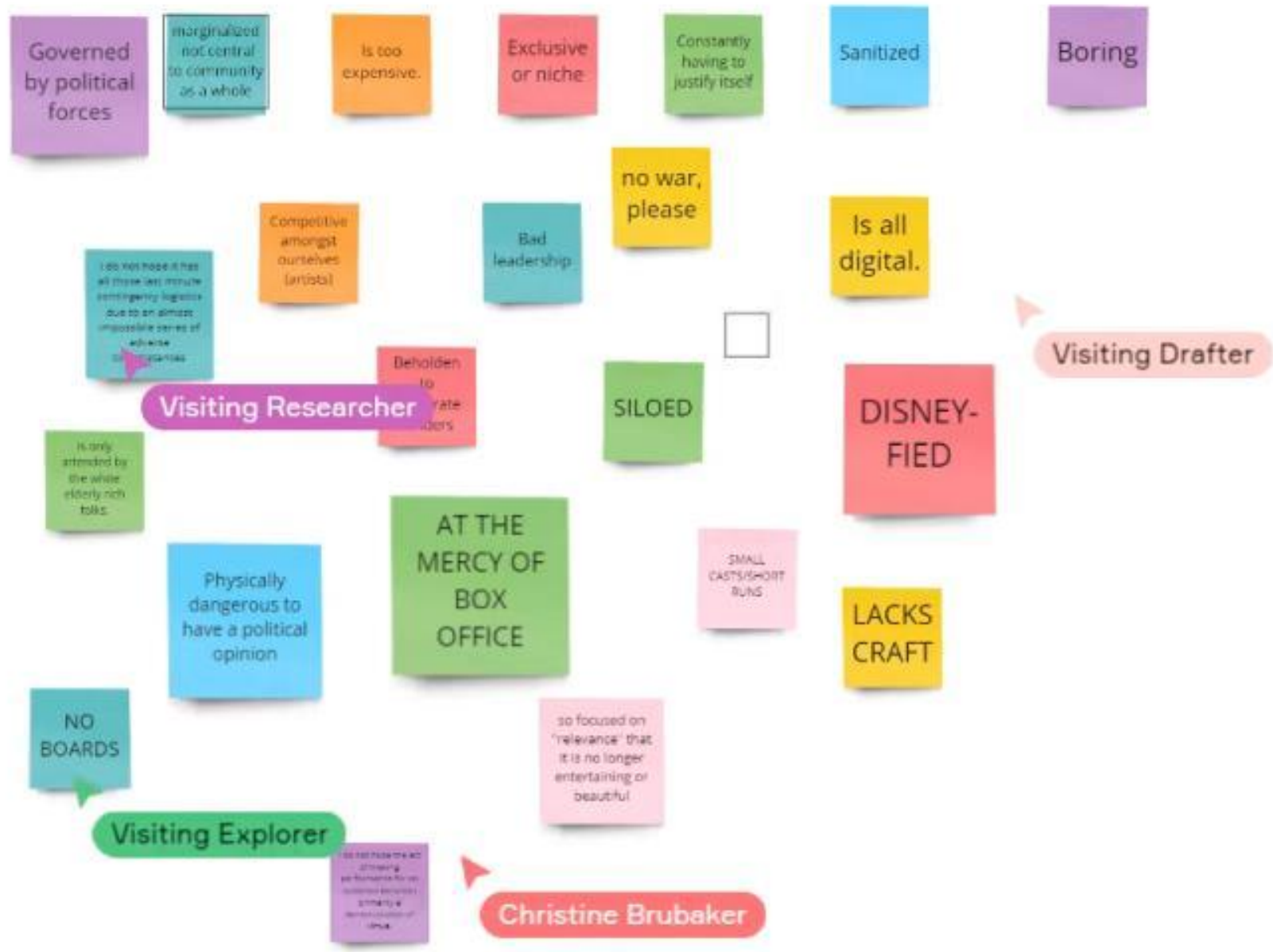
Pour a glass of wine

Not ready not to see friends and family

In 2040, I hope Prairie-based theatre...(use sticky notes to describe)



In 2040, I do NOT hope Prairie-based theatre...(use sticky notes to describe)



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