Open Heart Arts Theatre shared the following *Draft Artist Handbook* in 2024 as part of their Balancing Act Level UP! Pilot Project.

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If you have any questions or would like to discuss these materials, please contact Balancing Act at balancingact@theatredirect.ca.

Open Heart Arts Theatre
Artist Handbook

This is a draft of a still-developing document to be used for the onboarding of artists and contractors working with Open Heart. Some of the information, ideas, and designs are incomplete or indications of what will be further developed. The document was most recently updated on April 5, 2024.

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Welcome to Open Heart Arts Theatre

We’re glad you’re here.

Design: Photos of Artistic Director, Artistic Producer, and other key additional staff, and all board members with their names and roles. Email addresses and phone numbers for AD, AP, and Board Chair will be included.

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About the Artist Handbook

Dear Artist, meet your Artist Handbook! This document is designed to provide background on Open Heart's company culture and set some expectations for how we'll work together. This is a *living document*, which means that it can and will change to best reflect our ways of working and being in community with each other.

All artists and contractors engaged by Open Heart are required to have a full understanding of the information presented in this document before we start working together. To help you gain that understanding, here's a few ways you can receive this info:

1. By reading this digital document
2. By watching this X-minute video
3. By requesting a printed, hard-copy of this document to be provided to you by Open Heart
4. By booking a phone call, Zoom call, or in-person meeting with an Open Heart staff member to review this information together. Find their contact information on page 2.

This handbook is available for you to come back to at anytime, and is posted on our website at [url].

This document accompanies your letter of agreement that provides more specific information about fees, expectations of your role within the project, hours, and so on. Both your letter of agreement and the information in this handbook don't supersede CTA, IATSE, ADC, and other labour relation policies under which we may engage contractors.

No handbook can cover every situation so when a question does arise, please consult with your project's manager, Open Heart leadership, or the board of directors for clarification.

We are committed to working above these baseline expectations listed in this handbook. We recognize that one size does not fit all and will work towards providing individuals with what they need to ensure they are working safely, efficiently, and productively.

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About Open Heart

Founded in 2017 and incorporated not-for-profit in 2020, Open Heart Arts Theatre (also referred to as Open Heart) is a performing arts company based in Hamilton, Ontario. Through community collaboration, we create performances that connect and inspire. We are forging new pathways in performance by challenging who gets to make theatre, where it's performed, and how audiences are invited to engage. We believe in the transformative power of creativity and collaboration, and envision a world where all stories are heard.

Open Heart Arts Theatre has a special interest in:

- Collectively creating works of art that allows the many voices of the city to be heard
- Questioning who gets to make theatre, for whom and where we make theatre
- Creating opportunities for creation and providing mentorship
- Encouraging meaningful relationships between artists, community, and audience members
- Creating in an environmentally sustainable way

Where we work

Most of Open Heart's activities take place in Hamilton, Ontario on the traditional territories of the Erie, Attawandaron (Neutral), Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee and Mississaugas. This land is covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabek to share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes.

Recognizing the history of the land is one way of honouring the lives and stories of Indigenous people who have been living and working here from time immemorial, but it's just one small action in a larger story of reconciliation. Here and now, Open Heart shares this commitment to care for this land and the people who live here. We do this by being intentional with how and who we work with, challenging traditional colonial methods of theatre making, and making environment-conscious choices whenever possible.

Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression

We are invested in equity for all, across race, ability and class. We aim to be part of the anti oppression movement to create a supportive and safe world that is equitable for all of us. It is our intent that everyone feels invited, wanted, and welcomed to participate in our events and activities.

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Our Performance Creation Process

The cornerstone of our activities is developing community-engaged performances with the goal of creating meaningful relationships between artists, community participants, and audiences. We do this in multi-year cycles:

Year One to Two: With the support of partner organizations, we bring together professional artists and community members to build relationships through art-making workshops.

Year Two to Four: With the ensemble created in Year One, we develop and present a performance to an audience with opportunities for talk-backs and discussion.

Year Three and onwards: We work with partner organizations to establish legacy programming, ensuring there are ongoing art opportunities for the communities we engage with.

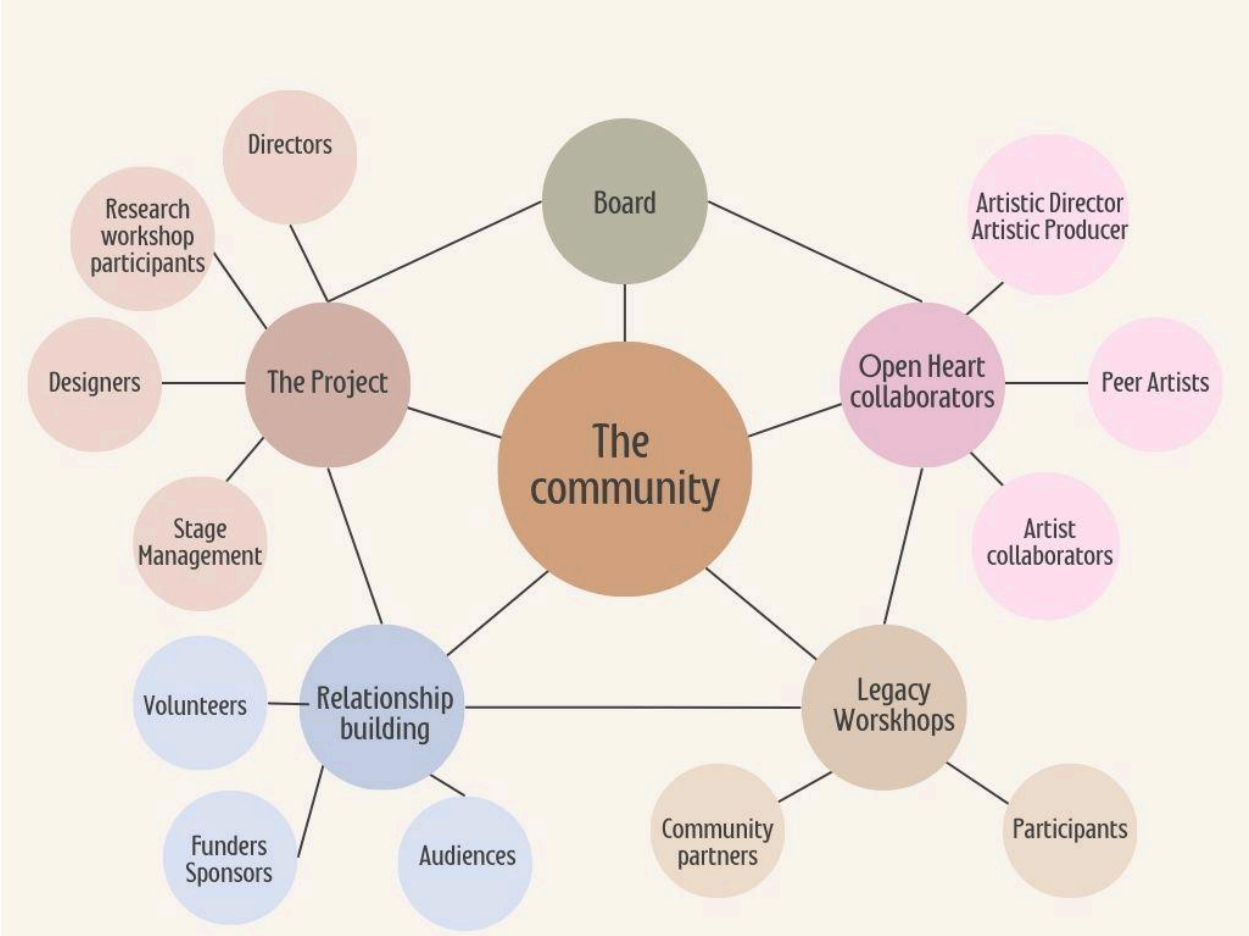
This information could be displayed more like this, but scaled it for readability:

Artist development, mentorship, and learning

We're invested in the professional development of all artists and arts professionals who work with us – that means you! As one of the only performance-focused community arts organizations in Hamilton, we are always looking for opportunities to share knowledge. Some ways we do that are by:

- Offering professional development workshops for artists interested in working collaboratively with community
- Mentoring emerging community-engaged arts workers by hiring Intern Producers and high school co-op students
- Providing mentorship, fees, and resources to artists via our Artist-in-Residence Program
- Consulting with local organizations on best-practices for working in community with others

Creating a safe and affirming work environment together



At Open Heart, we work in a highly collaborative community-engaged process. By working with us, you're part of a community with lots of opportunities for connection, learning, growth and accountability. Open Heart, our staff and board, volunteers, participants, and the artists we engage (you) are all responsible for contributing to the collective well-being of our Open Heart community.

Here are Open Heart's commitments to you:

- We're an *equal opportunity employer*, which means we engage folks based on their skills, lived and professional experience, interest, capacity. We don't discriminate on the basis of race, religion, gender, age, sexuality, or disability.

- We commit to honouring the time and energy you commit to the project, as well as acknowledging the importance of a healthy work/life balance. We will compensate you in

accordance to the details laid out in your contract or agreement. In the event that work hours change, we'll work together to find a solution that meets the needs of both parties.

- We know that a safer and affirming work environment looks and feels different to everyone. We will work to understand what a safer space looks and feels like *for you*, and will work to meet those needs to the best of our capacity. More details in the “Needs Assessment” section on page **.

- We don’t tolerate violence, harassment or discrimination in any form by or against our board, leadership, staff, volunteers, contractors, partners, program participants, or anyone Open Heart may come into contact with during company activities. We commit to take all reasonable steps to proactively protect you and others in Open Heart’s workspaces. In the event that harm does occur, we commit to acknowledge and address conflict with accountability while honouring and protecting the complainant. More information in the “Conflict Transformation” section on page **.

- We will be as clear as possible in our expectations of you as they relate to the Open Heart project you’re working on. We will operate from a care-centered place of transparency and generosity, assuming the best intentions of those we work with and in the broader community.

Here are what we expect from you:

- You’ll communicate what you need to succeed in your role and to have a positive working experience with Open Heart through our “Needs Assessment” process laid out on page **. You’ll work within your capacity to accommodate the needs of others if/when they are disclosed to you.

- You’ll collaborate with us to contribute to a safe and affirming work environment. This means you won’t commit any act of violence, harassment, or discrimination towards Open Heart’s leadership, staff, board, volunteers, contractors, partners, program participants, or members of the public at large. In the event that harm does occur, you’ll engage with Open Heart in an Conflict Transformation Process. More details on page **.

- You’ll do everything within your capacity to succeed in your roles as an artist/arts worker, bringing your creativity, passion, and excellence to your work with Open Heart.

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Help us help you succeed

We want your experience working with Open Heart to be positive, enjoyable, meaningful, and fun! And beyond that, we want to make sure you have what you need to succeed. Before the start of your working experience, we're asking you to complete a questionnaire outlining what you need to thrive in your role. This information helps Open Heart leadership and staff to mindfully plan programming, schedules, and budgets that will best serve the people we're working with.

Please know you are never required to disclose medical information or diagnoses, can include as much or as little detail as you're comfortable with, and have the right to change or add to this information at any time by talking to an Open Heart staff member.

What is asked

Things like:

- Do you have any needs that would help you physically be present in the space? E.g. You require workshop/performances spaces to be wheelchair accessible. You are only comfortable standing or sitting for certain periods of time. You are sensitive to light/noise/temperature. You will be bringing a support person or service animal. You require support with transportation to/from program spaces.
- Do you have any needs that will help you mentally be present in the space? E.g. You need 15 minutes to settle in. You require flexible start times. You appreciate written instructions vs. verbal or vice-versa. You need an agenda prior to arriving.
- Anything we need to know about your schedule? E.g. you work another job between these hours, you need to provide childcare in the afternoon period, you're at your sharpest in the mornings, you need a break at X time to eat/take medication/etc.
- Anything we should know about your preferred forms of communication? E.g. you may need follow-ups to emails. We should only call you between 9am-5pm or 12pm and 2pm, etc.
- Do you have any allergies, food sensitivities, or dietary restrictions?

How do I fill it out

You can complete the needs assessment in the following ways:

Google Form
A written email
A voice note
A phone call/Zoom call/or in-person meeting with Open Heart leadership or the supervisor of your Open Heart project

Who gets this information

We will provide you with specific names and roles of who this information is going to that is specific to the Open Heart project you're working on. If you haven't yet received this information,

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please reach out to your Open Heart point person. You have the right to ask for any digital or written documentation to be deleted at any time.

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The Conflict Transformation Process

We believe that conflict between human beings is inevitable, but not inherently negative. In fact, conflict can be the catalyst to transformative change, increasing accountability, deepening empathy, promoting mutual understanding, and restoring respect. Instances of conflict at Open Heart will be handled through a Conflict Transformation process. This is not a conflict resolution process, which aims to “fix” a problem but instead focuses on transforming conflict into a possibility for growth for the parties involved.

Steps to Conflict Transformation involve:

1. *Awareness - individuals become aware of the conflict*
2. *Assessment - This may involve gathering information about the conflict*
3. *Action - address the conflict with direct action*
4. *Resolution - Resolution may be achieved through negotiation, mediation, or other peaceful means*

If you experience conflict while working with Open Heart, you may wish to:

1. Speak with the person you are in conflict with if you feel safe and empowered to do so. If both parties are able to reflect on the conflict and identify how they’d like to move forward, the conflict is transformed

2. If you do not feel comfortable speaking to the person you are in conflict with - or if the conflict continues even after speaking to that person - you are encouraged to contact someone in Open Heart leadership. We know that the context of the conflict, your lived experience, and many other factors can inform who you feel comfortable speaking to, so there are some options in who this person may be. They are your Project Supervisor, the Artistic Director (Kelly), the Artistic Producer (Rose), the Board Chair or other Board Members. Their contact information can be found on page XX of this document. Whoever you bring the conflict to will:

- Acknowledge the conflict
- Work with you to set a date for a Conflict Transformation Circle or to identify next steps

3. In the case where a conflict or an incident of harm occurs during an Open Heart activity, and the injured party no longer feels safe proceeding in the work environment, they should immediately alert the leader of the Open Heart activity (Project Supervisor or Open Heart leadership). The work session will stop and Open Heart staff will work with you to identify next steps.

What is a Conflict Transformation Circle?

A Conflict Transformation Circle is a facilitated conversation with the goal of engaging in clear, respectful communication for the potential of a new relationship between people experiencing conflict. Circles will take place in a private, neutral setting and will be led by a mutually agreed upon facilitator.

At any time, if the injured party asserts that participating in a Conflict Transformation Circle will cause further harm, the process will be stopped. If a Conflict Transformation Circle is ineffective or the harm is so severe that the conflict is irreconcilable, the process will conclude and the situation will then be addressed through other measures.

Zero Tolerance Policies

The Conflict Transformation Process is not appropriate for all situations. Open Heart Arts Theatre does not tolerate harassment, discrimination, or violence in any form, including but not limited to: racism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, or sexual misconduct, and verbal/physical assault. In the event that an Open Heart staff or board member, artist, contractor, participant, or volunteer is found to have violated this policy, their engagement will be terminated.

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Thank You!

We believe that conflict between human beings is inevitable, but not inherently negative. In fact, conflict

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