



Internal Analysis of Inclusion & Diversity in The Sterling Awards

Thank you to the Edmonton theatre community for their generous call-in of the practices of the Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Awards. Thank you to those who have offered their emotional labour in expressing their thoughts and experiences over the years. We are open to any and all feedback on past oppressive behaviours that we recognize as being a part of a larger problem of systemic racism, homophobia, and ableism in the Edmonton theatre community and we sincerely apologize for the harm caused by our past actions. We will do better.

First, we would like to address past and current practices when it comes to the selecting of the Sterling jurors and committee members. There are many missteps outlined here. It is important for us to outline these missteps before we commit to new practices.

Both the committee and juries are made up of Edmonton theatre professionals who have shown a commitment to theatre as a profession. They are a mix of theatre administrators, directors, performers, designers, educators, stage managers, and technicians, all of whom volunteer their time to make the event happen each year. Recruitment has been conducted by the Sterling committee through personal outreach or through our website (www.sterlingawards.com/get-involved). Historically the Sterling Committee has been made up of mostly straight, white cis women and Queer, white cis men. Although we have recently added new faces into the mix, we have fallen into the same pattern of membership within the committee.

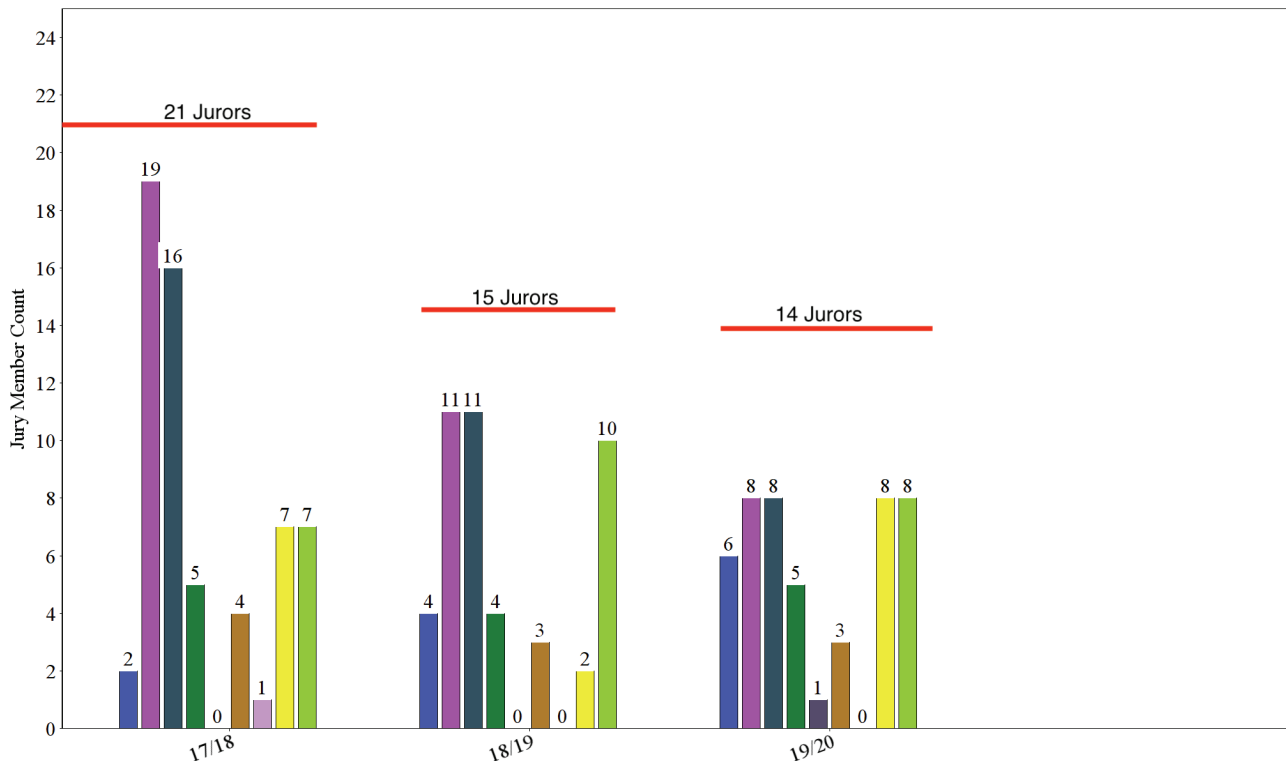
In the last three years, the committee has taken steps towards recruiting more underrepresented members of the theatre community for the mainstage season and Fringe juries. We have welcomed and will continue to welcome juror recommendations from previous jury members, artistic staff, and all members of our theatre community in addition to our own recruitment. These actions have resulted in greater engagement with BIPOC and also emerging artists. We acknowledge that there is still much work to be done and are committed to assembling Sterling Awards juries that are representative of the Edmonton theatre community as a whole.

Sterling Award Jury & Committee Statistics 2017-2020

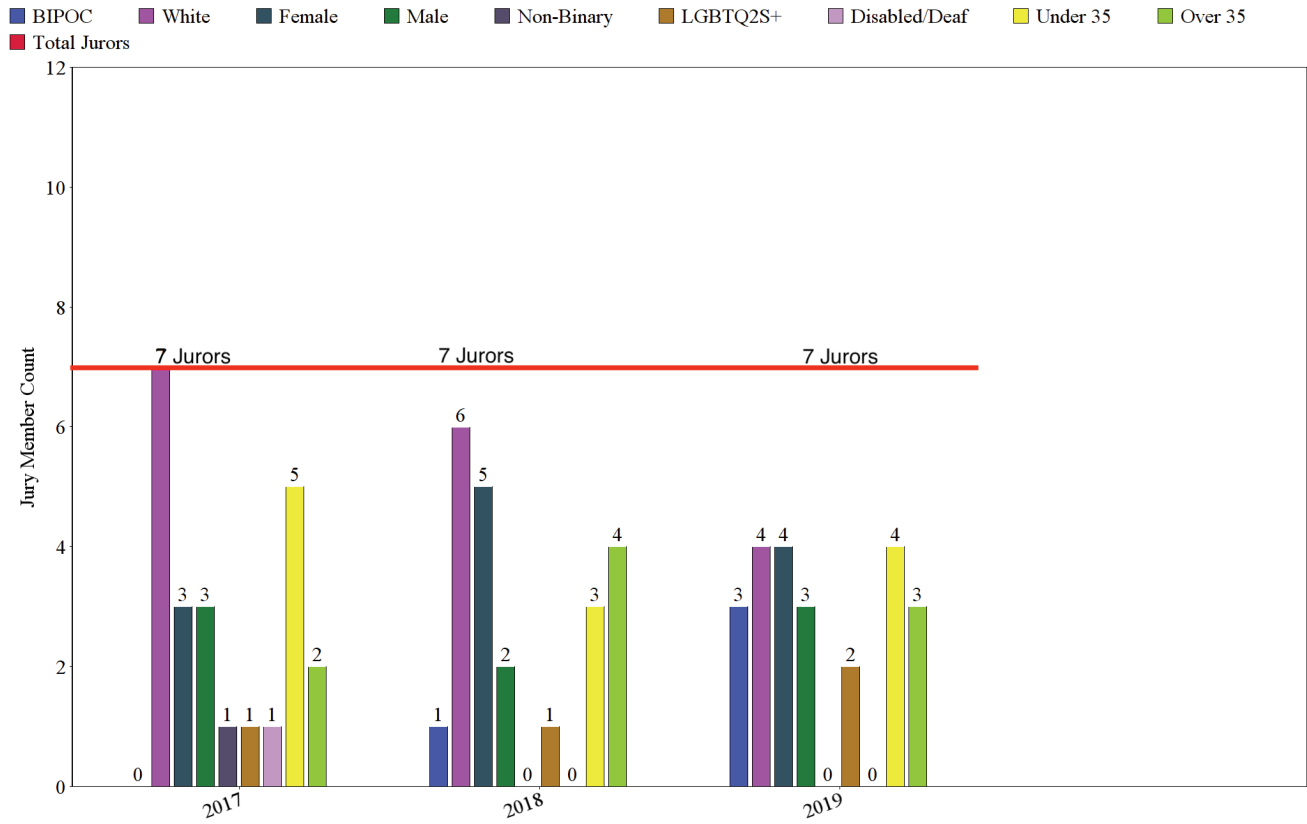
We started examining statistics for the committee and jury in 2017. Prior to 2017, almost all juries were 100% white, 75%F, 25% M, 0% NB, 25% LGBTQ2S+, 0% Disabled or Deaf, and 70% over 35 and 30% under 35. It is only in the past 3 years that we have seen change in the jury while not seeing change in the committee.

Regular Season Jury (Jury Member Numbers)

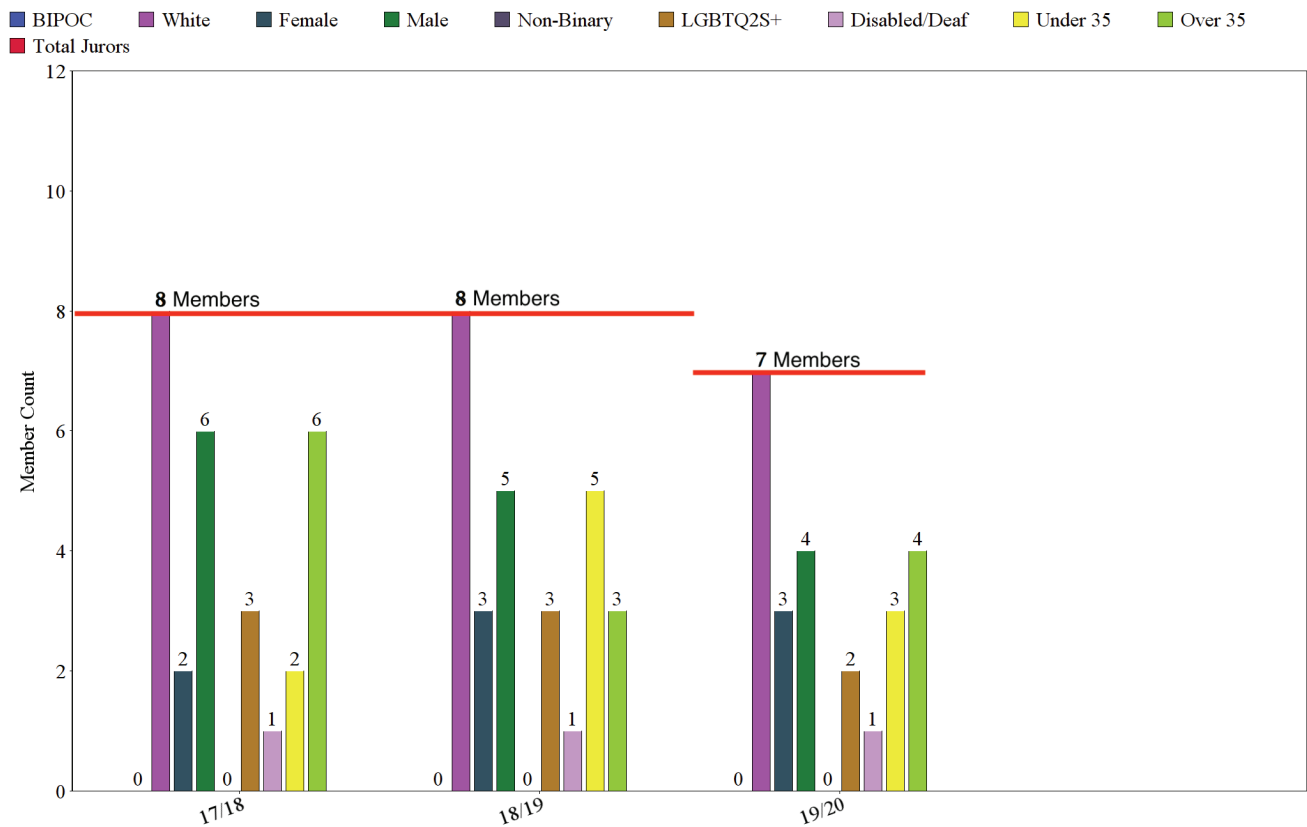
■ BIPOC
 ■ White
 ■ Female
 ■ Male
 ■ Non-Binary
 ■ LGBTQ2S+
 ■ Disabled/Deaf
 ■ Under 35
 ■ Over 35
■ Total Jurors



Fringe Jury (Jury Member Numbers)



Committee Numbers



Analysis & Reflection

1 The Sterling Committee

A group of volunteer organizers who are responsible for recruiting jury members for the Fringe and for the Mainstage season, providing the juries with a yearly schedule and facilitating comp tickets for jury members to attend Edmonton theatre productions, fundraising and sponsorship, and producing the annual Sterling Awards event.

INTERNAL ASSESSMENT: If you look at the stats of the past 3 seasons, it is glaring that there are no BIPOC individuals on the Sterling committee.

ACTION TO CHANGE: At least 2-3 BIPOC individuals must be recruited immediately and must be integral to the planning of any future juries and events. There must also be a specific reach out to the LGBTQ2S+, NB, and Disabled and Deaf community for more representation on the Sterling committee.

BARRIERS/RESISTANCES TO CHANGE: “We are volunteers.” “We don’t want to ask underrepresented folk for more free labour.” “Why would underrepresented communities want to engage with Edmonton theatre or the Sterling Committee as it has been so heavily-based in upholding white supremacist models.”

OVERCOMING BARRIERS FOR CHANGE TO HAPPEN:

- a. In the short term: More robust fundraising/sponsorship to be able to offer honorariums to committee members.
- b. Bettering and increasing our outreach instead of waiting for folks from underrepresented communities to offer their help.
- c. Making sure there is due diligence in responding to emails, social media posts, and questions put forth by the community.
- d. In the long term: Taking action towards restructuring the Sterling Committee and developing partnerships to help build the committee’s capacity and resources so we can reflect the diversity of Edmonton’s theatre community
- e. Investing in anti-racist training and building solid anti-racist policies in: recruiting individuals to be a part of committees, recruiting and accepting jury members, and producing an event that is inclusive to all and represents the diversity of the Edmonton theatre community.

2 The Mainstage Jury

A group of volunteer jurors who attend at least 75% of all professional theatre productions* and professional Independent productions included in the city of Edmonton for Sterling award consideration. They receive 1-2 complimentary tickets to each of the eligible productions in the season which runs from June-May each year.

INTERNAL ASSESSMENT: There has been growth in engaging with BIPOC individuals in the regular season jury. We are currently at 43% BIPOC jurors which has shown a 40% growth from 2018/19 and a 77% growth from 2017/18. We are currently in a flat pattern with recruiting LGBTQ2S+ folks and folks with lived experience with disability. There has also historically been little engagement with non-binary individuals.

ACTION TO CHANGE: Active recruitment must continue to engage with folks from underrepresented communities. We must also communicate a clear policy for accepting and rejecting potential volunteer jurors.

BARRIERS/RESISTANCES TO CHANGE: “We don’t want to ask underrepresented folk for more free labour.” “It’s very hard for individuals to dedicate an entire year to seeing 1-4 theatre productions/week.” “Why would underrepresented communities want to engage with Edmonton theatre or the Sterling jury as it is so heavily-based in upholding white supremacist models?” “The cost of hiring ASL interpreters and the fact that some venues are not accessible are barriers for some of our disabled and Deaf community members to be on the juries.”

OVERCOMING BARRIERS FOR CHANGE TO HAPPEN:

- a. In the short term: More robust fundraising/sponsorship to be able to offer honourariums to jury members and ASL interpretation for any potential Deaf jury members.
- b. Reaching out to specific individuals who might be interested in joining the jury instead of waiting for underrepresented folks to offer their help.
- c. Heavy consideration of the jury’s schedule to avoid burnout or fatigue.
- d. Encouraging all companies to provide two tickets rather than one so jurors do not have to see theatre alone.
- e. Examine the barriers associated with hiring an outside consultant to create a document for all Sterling jurors to refer to in order to help them address their own internalized biases and prejudices when conducting their evaluations as jurors. If the barrier of hiring a consultant can be met we must implement this in advance of the next theatre season.
- f. Provide anti-racist workshops for jurors.

**Professional Theatre Productions: The Sterlings classify “professional theatre productions” as productions that pay their artists or engage artists under a paid contract.*

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The Fringe Jury

A group of volunteer jurors who attend Edmonton-based Fringe productions (that must be submitted to the Sterling Committee for inclusion) for Sterling award consideration. The Fringe jury is given 1 comp to each Edmonton-based Fringe productions. Sometimes jurors can’t see all shows because there are so many - in this instance, their schedules are broken up and dispersed amongst them.

INTERNAL ASSESSMENT: There has been growth in engaging with BIPOC individuals in the Fringe jury. The 2019/2020 Fringe jury was made up of 43% BIPOC jurors which has shown a 100% growth from 2017/18 when there were no BIPOC individuals on the jury. As is similar with the Mainstage Sterling Jury, there are currently flat patterns in recruiting LGBTQ2S+ and folks with lived experience with disability. There has also historically been little engagement with non-binary individuals. If the Sterling Committee has room in the budget, they receive a small honorarium as they are seeing 4-6 shows/day and need to eat on the Fringe site. In recent years, there has not been enough funds raised to offer honorariums to jurors.

ACTION TO CHANGE: Active recruitment must continue to engage with folks from underrepresented communities.

BARRIERS/RESISTANCES TO CHANGE: “It has historically been difficult to recruit folks to the Fringe jury.” “Why would underrepresented communities

want to engage with Edmonton theatre and the Fringe Sterling Jury as it is so heavily-based in upholding white supremacist models?" "The cost of hiring ASL interpreters and the fact that some venues are not accessible are barriers for some of our disabled and Deaf community members to be on the juries."

OVERCOMING BARRIERS FOR CHANGE TO HAPPEN:

- a. In the short term: More robust fundraising/sponsorship to provide honourariums for Fringe jury members and ASL interpretation for any potential Deaf jury members.
- b. Reaching out to specific individuals who might be interested in joining the jury instead of waiting for underrepresented folks to offer their help.
- c. Hire an outside consultant to create a document for all Sterling jurors to refer to in order to help them address their own internalized biases and prejudices when conducting their evaluations as jurors.
- d. Provide anti-racist workshops for jurors.

Other Systematic Changes & Questions That Must Be Considered for Growth

- In the past, the Sterling Awards Ceremony has been located at a difficult to access venue and accompanied by a high ticket cost. The ticket cost and lack of accessibility to the event has made it difficult for younger members of the community to attend and meet working professionals. The event has also been a traditionally long event so when the "networking" portion of the evening began many industry leaders would leave the event. This creates a lack of opportunities for emerging artists to connect with these professionals.
- What are the purpose and goal of the awards?
- What does receiving an award do for an individual's career when companies and individuals consistently receive the same awards year after year?
- What is "excellence"? This is a word we use to describe why an individual or company receives a nomination. The jury is responsible for determining who is deemed as "excellent" but what are the tenants of "excellence"? How is excellent defined in the frame of the Sterling Awards?
- How is the Sterling Committee engaging with the community as a whole? Should committee members work for larger theatre organizations or be more grassroots individuals? What is theatrical ecology makeup of the Sterling jury?
- What consultations around the event, jury, and committee have been done and will be done?
- More up front and available information must be made available as to how decisions are made regarding committee and jury recruitment, inter-committee decision making, planning the event, and awards for the Margaret Mooney Award for Achievement in Administration, The Ross Hill award for Achievement in Production, and the Outstanding Contribution to Theatre in Edmonton.

These are the beginnings of conversations that must continue. Thank you, once again, to the Edmonton Theatre community for demanding better of us and calling us to reflect, collect, and move forward towards an event that reflects and celebrates ALL our community members. We recognize that this analysis is coming directly from the committee itself which is set up as a grassroots ad-hoc and that we do not report to a board of directors or follow the not-for-profit organization model.