



Annual General Report 2024

Developed by Fiona Kerr, Operations Manager

Year-Round Overview - Fall

After beginning my contract in late October, my immediate task was reestablishing contact and communication with the community, both publicly and privately. Many messages to the board had gone unanswered, just like public communication on social media.

I immediately started reestablishing communication with sponsors and community partners, many of whom were left unanswered after the parade was canceled. I also created a short term social media strategy that involved a public statement about the silence and the new board.

First steps for establishing communication:

- Public statement about lack of communication and festival in 2023.
- Public statement about rescheduling the parade and that we would hold off until the 2024 festival.
- Public statement regarding parade refunds.
- Announcement of a community meeting later in the fall for organizational updates and planning.

Following the Community Meeting in December to offer updates about planning and organizational stability, we began planning a winter event to relaunch the organization. We planned a small hangout type event at Garrison Brewing, aimed at allowing community members to connect with new friends. The event was rescheduled due to weather, and was moderately attended.



Financials

The overall financial state of the organization when I began my contract was not bad. The bank account was in very good standing and very little money had been spent in 2023. Any outstanding invoices from 2022 were paid immediately.

One of the major financial tasks was responding to parade refund emails and processing refunds and deferrals. I created a tracking system and offered either full refund, payment deferral to previous participants, or donation to the society. Most entries deferred to 2024. In total, we issued close to fifty thousand dollars in refunds. Myself and the board also worked throughout the year on re-establishing connections with grant funders, including the federal, provincial, and municipal governments. All were understanding of the situation in 2023, and advised us accordingly so we would stay on track to still receive funding.

We submitted a new application to Heritage Canada outlining last year's situation. We also submitted a robust application to the Festivals & Events program under Communities, Culture, and Tourism with the province to receive three years of operating funding, which was approved. Our municipal funding was in the middle of a grant agreement cycle, and they did not request we return the 2023 payment. We received our expected amount from HRM. We expect to submit a new grant application to HRM in November, and to receive the same amount we currently do.

This year's festival generated more income than expected. While gate entry sales were lower than expected on parade weekend, bar sales increased significantly. We also implemented advance ticket sales this year, mostly for cash flow throughout the spring. Tickets sales landed where we expected, but we will be reviewing the platform used and likely seeking a custom built platform in 2025.

A few changes in grant schedules due to the lack of funding received in 2023, and changes in grant programs meant that our cash flow was better than what we have seen in the past. While we usually receive all grant funding prior to the festival, a few payments were delayed and not received until after the festival. This helped significantly with cashflow at this time of year.



Lyle Tilley Davidson has been engaged to complete the financial engagement review approved at 2022 AGM. The engagement was supposed to take place over the winter in 2023, but did not once staff left the organization. The process will begin in late fall.

Sponsorship

We spent most of the fall reviewing the existing sponsorship package and levels. We increased the contribution amount for each level, as they have not been increased since pre-COVID. We removed the Silver+ level and incorporated free parade entry into the Silver level.

We created an al-a-carte portion of sponsorship. We have seen other Prides have success with this. We gave sponsors the opportunity to sponsor specific areas on the Festival Site and specific festival events. There was good uptake, and partners were offered logo and marketing presence for all al-a-carte options.

The sponsorship vetting process did not change this year. We have always required sponsors to tell us what specific steps and initiatives they are taking to support their 2SLGBTQIA+ employees and networks. Many sponsors were returning from 2022 and before.

Our relationship with TD was not negatively impacted by 2023. They still donated the agreed \$30,000 in 2023, and did not request we reimburse them despite not fulfilling the sponsorship agreement.

In late 2023, we submitted our annual application for funding to them. We began conversations with their national office, who were enthusiastic about our team's return and the 2024 festival. They indicated an increase in funding, with a review of the terms of our agreement with them. The only significant change they requested was changing their title from "Rainbow Sponsor" to "Presenting Sponsor". Although we have pushed back on this term in the past, they indicated that it was in line with all other Prides across the country.



Through conversations with TD leading up to the festival, and following our public statement around our funding, they decided to scale back their festival presence nationally.

Following this and much community feedback, the board met to discuss our relationship with TD and what it might look like going forward. It was decided that we would gradually scale back our funding from them over the next two years. TD was notified of this decision, and were surprised we wanted to pull back. They indicated that they would continue to support our community, regardless.

We have decided we will not be submitting an application for TD funding this year. We will instead spend that time seeking new grant or sponsorship funding throughout the fall months. While we do expect the absence of their funding to impact sponsorship income, I am confident we can find the funding elsewhere.

Festival Operations

After re-establishing connections with community partners, we started working on preliminary plans for the festival. This included:

- Parade logistics planning with HRM Special Events Task Force
- Festival schedule development
- Website maintenance
- Communication plan development
- Artist and performer needs
- Contract staff needs

All previous logistics suppliers were contracted for this year's festival. After receiving multiple quotes, we made the decision to work with a new tent company, Commercial Tent, after they supplied the large stage tent in 2022.

TourTech East was contracted for all festival AV, and were enthusiastic about continuing our relationship, despite the delay in payment from 2022.



After assessing the capacity of our two staff team, we created new contract roles such as Service & Sponsorship Coordinator, and created a call for existing ones such as Parade Coordinator, Accessibility Coordinator, ASL Coordinator, and Artist Liaison. A core group of previous staff and contractors returned to alleviate the need to train all new hires with limited resources, and a number of roles were filled by new hires after a month-long hiring process. Given the financial situation, we are proud that all contractors were compensated fairly and contract fees were increased from 2022.

Overall, the operations of the festival were a success. After having a year away from the Garrison Grounds, there were a few bumps along the way during planning and load-in, but it went as smoothly as we could have hoped.

The festival site layout was an improvement from 2022 in some ways, and detracted from guest experience in others. The gate was reoriented to allow two lines, one for tickets at the door and one for advance tickets. This allowed us to process guests at the door faster than in the past, and have better line control.

The main piece of feedback we received was in regard to the bar lines. We were aware during the events that the bar line was very long and moving slowly, especially on Saturday night. When we made layout changes to the bar, it was to alleviate a build up of people at the actual bar, but we did not address the lines building up. We have already had conversations with other event organizers and some of our liquor partners about how we can improve the bar experience, and will be implementing numerous changes in 2025.

We will also be looking to expand the capacity and layout of the Festival Site. Other events have found ways to optimize the space, so we will be looking at reorienting the stage and tents to create better traffic flow.



Festival Schedule

In order to further stabilize the festival, we decided to scale back the festival schedule from 35+ events to approximately 20. We changed our Garrison Grounds booking for this year to scale back from a week to four days, meaning we only hosted the Festival Site for the first weekend of the festival instead of using it as our main venue for the duration of the festival.

I began doing outreach to local queer groups and organizations to discern if there was any interest in collaborating on events. A few groups were interested, including the Rainbow Refugees of NS and Halifax Rainbow Dodgeball. A number of groups also reached out to us, seeking either event collaborations or advice, which developed into a number of event partnerships. These included Eastern Front Theatre, Wanderers FC, Volleyball Nova Scotia, and the YMCA.

Most of our programming following the parade weekend was hosted in the evening. This was partially to encourage greater turnout, but also due to conserving costs for venue rentals around the city. Most events were hosted at partner venues such as the YMCA, which came with no associated costs.

Parade

Each year, we work closely with the HRM Special Events Task Force to determine an optimal parade route and coordinate all parade day logistics. We approached them with the desire to utilize the same route we did in 2022, but there was push back due to traffic concerns around the Cogswell construction. After a few months of back and forth, and multiple proposed routes from both sides, we settled on this year's route. Our operations team had trepidation about the route, but it was the only one proposed that led the parade to the Garrison Grounds.

We took extra steps to prepare for the end of parade logistics, seeing as the route circled back on itself. We worked with Halifax Regional Police to ensure our team could



make decisions around traffic flow at the end of the parade, which they were very receptive to.

Parade applications were made public in February. Any deferred entries from 2023 were given a week to apply before the application went live. Parade fees were also reviewed from 2023. Some levels increased (large business), while others decreased (small community group) as we could not discern how the 2023 board calculated increases.

Parade applications had great uptake, so much so that we closed applications two weeks early in May due to reaching capacity.

We spent the weeks leading up to the parade doing internal planning for parade stoppages and protestors. Following the stoppages in Toronto and Winnipeg, we expected a stoppage at some point on our parade route. I worked closely with the Parade Coordinator and other operations staff to create a contingency plan that did not involve police involvement. We also consulted with HRP on their processes, and advised them not to step in and let us liaise with demonstrators. They agreed that we should make the decision to end the parade early if the situation came to that.

I also consulted with other Pride organizers across the country for their contingency plans, but we seemed to be the most prepared. Many Prides wanted to wait and see how our parade went and we handled a stoppage before making firm contingency plans.

Overall, the new marshaling site and parade route worked well. Marshaling on Cogswell St gave us more than enough room for all entries. The check in process was not as streamlined as we had hoped, but we plan to make changes next year.

We also plan to make extensive changes to the application and payment process, as we have not made major changes since pre-COVID. We will also be re-imaging our selection process, implementing processes and scoring matrices used by other Prides. We plan to keep the parade the same size, with around 120 entries. Parade fees will likely stay the same as 2024, contingent on HRM operating costs not increasing.



Accessibility

Following the 2022 festival, staff did an in-depth review of accessibility features on the Festival Site. 2022 saw a number of new features introduced. Some were successful, and some needed more development and community feedback for better execution.

The Accessible Viewing Area in front of the mainstage was the main concern for the team. The area had not been well thought out or laid out in 2022, and it created many issues around accessing, security policing the area, and the logistics of seating. After the festival, the 2022 operations team created a new plan for the area, which was unfortunately not used in 2023.

The changes created by that team were implemented this year, with great success. The area size was increased, with its own separate entrance, bar, and toilets. The area was better fenced off, and its use was not policed by security or staff. The seating for the area had good sightlines for ASL, and for performances in general.

The separate accessible entrance was utilized, but could have been better advertised.

A number of other accessible spaces on the Festival Site were not created this year, as we did not have the capacity to ensure all areas were well run. One of these areas was the decompression space. The space was not well utilized in 2022, and we recognize the difficulty in creating a true decompression and quiet space outdoors using tents. We plan to do more community consultation around the area, and gather suggestions for creating pop up decompression spaces with the limitations we have.

The Accessible Viewing Spaces offered during the parade were also well utilized. So much so that we have identified a need to increase their capacity in 2025. The masked areas was new this year, and came together very quickly leading up to the festival. We recognized a need to separate the area from the other viewing areas, but struggled to find a physically accessible space along the parade route that could be situated away from the general crowd.

The accessible parking spaces at the Festival Site were not well utilized, similar to the 2022. We did introduce traffic control volunteers to assist with the spaces, but we still



found they were not used. We will be doing more community outreach on accessible parking.

Volunteer Program

The volunteer program usually starts taking shape in April of each festival year. However, due to staffing restrictions we did not start volunteer recruitment until later in the spring. Calls for Volunteer Leads went live first, with lots of interest from new and returning Volunteer Leads. All returning leads were given a position, along a number of new individuals after review of their applications by the operations team. Overall, we had less Volunteer Leads than in the past.

Volunteer training sessions were offered both in person and online. We offered slightly less sessions than in 2022, but found the uptake good. We hosted both in person sessions at the Halifax Convention Centre, which was central and accessible. We plan to look into hosting a session in Dartmouth in 2025.

The training itself was heavily reviewed by the Volunteer Coordinator and condensed from 2022. The operations team also reviewed the festival site information and accessibility information. We removed the sections around active listening and deescalation, as we did not think it was appropriate to ask volunteers to play those roles, or make them feel like it was expected of them. We indicated who on site would be training for both situations, and how to contact them.

The number of general volunteers was also lower this year. We believe a few factors contributed:

- Late recruitment
- Community lacking trust in the organization
- Less volunteer shifts available because of scaled back festival
- Less direct outreach than in previous years



The smaller number of volunteers on the Festival Site did pose some issues in regard to staffing certain areas of the site during events, but overall was not detrimental. Our Volunteer Coordinator had to spend time reassigning volunteers where needed, and we called on most staff and board to fill volunteer shifts.

A number of new volunteer roles were added this year, specifically at the gate. With the introduction of two ticket lines, we increased the number of gate attendance, and created new line control roles for both the gate and longer line down Sackville St. We also introduced traffic control to assist with pickups and accessible parking.

Outside of the Festival Site, volunteer shifts were limited. Many off-site events were staffed by community partner staff and volunteers, or HP staff.

Next year we plan to do a broader review of the Volunteer Lead program, to better identify what role they should play and what information they require prior to the festival.

Artist / Programming

2024 saw the largest number of drag, dance, and burlesque performers we have ever programmed on the mainstage. We primarily focused on programming local talent, mainly to cut back on travel and accommodation costs.

In total, 88% of artists were located in HRM, 7% in other parts of Nova Scotia, and 2% were from out of province.

While we had hoped to have space for more music and speakers this year, when the festival schedule came together it mainly included drag performance events. We included other artists in the programming calls in case new events were created with slots for them.

During the application review and selection process, staff and board focused on three main criteria:



- Location of artists (HRM, Nova Scotia, or regional)
- Groups - to maximize artists on stage, we encouraged folks to apply for group numbers.
- Members of historically underrepresented communities

Through two rounds of selection, the lineup for The Bump & Grind, Drag on the Mainstage, and a few other events like the March & Vigil were confirmed. Artists received confirmation emails in the timeline stated at time of application.

We recognize some challenges we faced with acceptance emails and messaging. To ensure everyone was notified clearly for each act they submitted, we did send multiple emails to some artists. Moving forward, we will try to streamline this communication and compile all application results in one email.

MelaNATION: A QTBIPOC Showcase was programmed primarily by Chris Cochrane, its creator. Once artists were selected, our staff took over logistics and performance communications with them to ensure they received the same information as all other performers.

Through discussions around local performers and how to maximize ticket sales, we decided to bring in two headliners for Friday and Saturday night. While we had challenges confirming drag race headliners for Friday night due to our coinciding with Drag Con LA, we confirmed Coco Montrese and Langaja Estranja, whose fees were both in line with our budget. We also hired Sandy Duperval from Montreal, who has headlined The Grind multiple times.

Because there was no festival or stages for artists in 2023, we felt it was important to hire as many artists as we could. This meant shows had very little wiggle room and run sheets were very tight. This also created congestion backstage during events. While we are happy with the decision for 2024, we will likely scale back the number of slots per show moving forward. This will alleviate pressure on hosts, artists, and staff during showtime.



Through detailed surveys and feedback, we know that overall artist experience was improved and elevated this year. Many artists praised their on-site experience and pre-event communications.

We have identified a number of challenges and opportunities for change next year, including review of artist contracts, streamlining of communication, review of artist application processes, and review of the total number of artists per show.

Canada Pride 2027

Canada Pride is a national scale event, with the naming rights being licensed by Fierce Canada Pride. FCP is the national collective and support organization of Pride organizations in Canada. Prior to staff departures in 2022, there had been brief chats about Halifax Pride submitting a bid to host Canada Pride in the future, but COVID had derailed the last two editions of the event.

In January, staff and board members started seriously discussing our desire to host the event as the next step in our festival's growth. With the 2024 edition being hosted in Vancouver in July, we knew FCP would be looking toward the future and the next hosts.

Our group went to the FCP National Conference in Charlottetown in March with the intention of motioning FCP to open the bidding process at their Annual General Meeting.

In collaboration with Discover Halifax, we hosted a welcome reception at Gahan House to pitch our ideas, which over half of the conference and FCP membership attended. All were enthusiastic about HP hosting Canada Pride.

Following our successful and uncontested motion, FCP's leadership committed to opening and completing the bid process by July 2024, allowing the next host to take part in Vancouver before accepting the hosting rights from them.



Over the next three months, I worked closely with Discover Halifax, and Events Nova Scotia to develop our bid content and presentation. Discover Halifax provided financial support for the work and design of the presentation. We proposed a full eleven day schedule of events that would run concurrently with the 2027 festival, as well as the continuation human rights conference that was hosted for the first time this year in Vancouver.

Our bid was submitted right before the festival started, and was uncontested. Almost the entire FCP membership voted in favour of us hosting, and some expressed great support both directly and indirectly.

As we move through the early stages of planning the event, we have contracted a Project Manager for the event who will begin public outreach around a host committee throughout the winter months.

We anticipate the event will bring in close to 200,000 attendees from across Canada. We have already been in discussion with government funders about the event. We also expect to hire three times as many staff (contractors) as we would in a regular festival year.

While a formal announcement was made in the media immediately following Vancouver Canada Pride, we plan to roll out an announcement and communications plan later in the year.

Post-Festival

Overall, we consider the 2024 festival a massive success for our organization and community. With less than a year to plan the festival, the staff and board team pulled off some unimaginable things.

To see the festival go from non-existent, back to the scale we were in 2019, was remarkable. Community partners (new and existing) showed up to support us in our



planning in many ways. From partnering on events to full taking on the planning of collaboration events, these efforts took a significant burden off our small team. Being able to take so much post-festival information and planning from 2022 and enact it for this year's festival was also beneficial. Thankfully myself and other staff had already developed plans for 2023 prior to our departures, and we were able to simply pick those plans up for this year.

We are happy that the challenges we had were learning curves, and did not largely impact the running of the festival. We plan to put significant time into community feedback and review of existing operations processes as we head into an even bigger year in 2025.