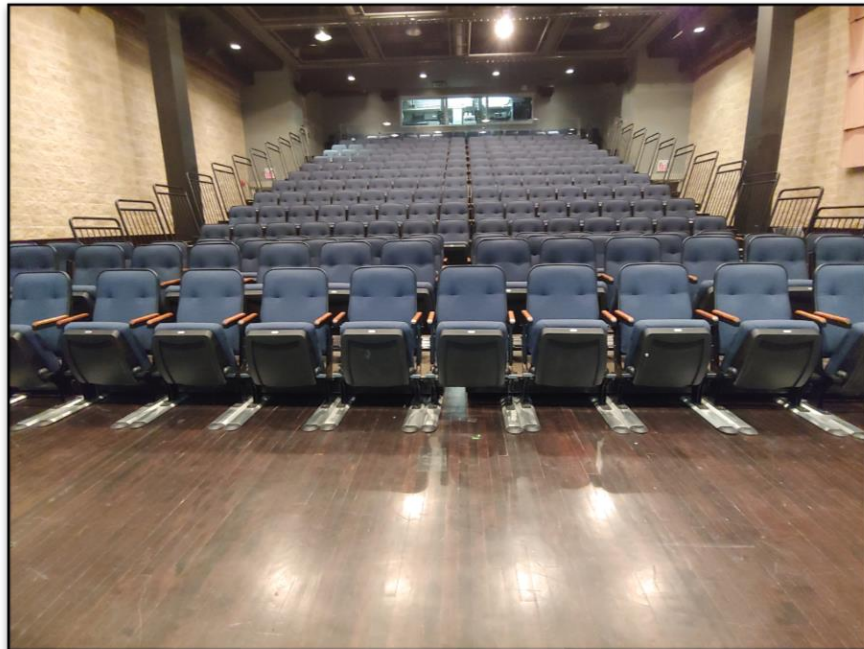




Creative Spaces Case Study Series

The Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre: The Al Green Theatre



This Creative Spaces Case Study Series is supported by:

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Introduction

These in-depth case studies will serve as a resource for arts and heritage organizations embarking on a capital project to learn from the successes and challenges of others in the sector.

In these case studies, we will be analyzing the **why** (why they took on this capital project), the **what** (what were they building and creating), the **who** (who are they serving, who supported this project, who led this project and who they hired), the **how** (how was the project financially supported and what positions were created/how were they funded), and **the ongoing** (what happened after? How is the building maintained/operated? Is it sustainable? How is revenue generated?) behind each project.

We have engaged a wide range of spaces from across the province from varying operational models, size, location, project size and artistic discipline. The case studies will focus on each organization's respective process for completing each project; from the planning phase, to the building phase, to the operations and maintenance phase. Following the completion of all 20 case studies, a Best Practice Summary will be developed and released on ABO's website, free for all to access.

The case study series is supported by the Learning Series, which is a collection of webinars and workshops that support ABO's core programs. Webinars that highlight the capital projects featured in this case studies series will be made available throughout 2018 – 2020. Please check www.artsbuildontario.ca/learningseries for upcoming dates.

The case study series is supported by the Department of Canadian Heritage and Canada Council for the Arts.

ArtsBuild Ontario

ArtsBuild Ontario is the only organization in Ontario dedicated to realizing long-term solutions to building, managing and financing the sustainable arts facilities needed in our communities.

ABO offers tools, resources and programs that support arts organizations with their creative space projects. ABO's core programs include Accessibility in Creative Spaces, SpaceFinder in Canada, Arts Facilities Mentoring Network, and Asset Planner for the Arts.

The Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre: The Al Green Theatre

Mission

The Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre (MNJCC) strives to be an inclusive and welcoming hub for a healthy and joyful community, anchored in Jewish Values, where all downtown Toronto feel they belong.

A vibrant venue for arts and culture in the heart of Toronto, the Al Green Theatre, located in the Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre, provides a professional and supportive environment, empowering artists to engage diverse audiences.

Historical Background

The Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre has welcomed over two million people to the corner of Bloor and Spadina during the building's 60+ year history. The changing makeup of our membership is a testament not only to the vibrancy and diversity of the Annex neighbourhood but to Toronto's own evolution. We provide opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to be active, learn, connect and participate in a wide range of cultural experiences. Rooted in Jewish values, the MNJCC is open to all.

The MNJCC is home to a 3,800+ member state-of-the-art Fitness Centre, the 265 seat Al Green Theatre, four schools, three choirs, a wide range of arts and cultural activities, Jewish Life programming, and a robust adult cultural program. MNJCC is a founding member of the Bloor Street Cultural Corridor, and the lead organizer of the annual Annex Family Festival.

A part of the major renovations to the MNJCC was the vision to create a multi-use cultural arts facility in an already vibrant centre. In October of 2003 the Al Green Theatre opened its doors for the first time and has been serving a wide array of clients ever since. Our flexible seating includes 263 physical seats and 2 permanent wheelchair spaces (up to 14 of the physical seats can be removed to accommodate an additional 8 wheelchair spaces). In addition, we have the ability to remove all seating to accommodate banquet and cocktail-style configurations for receptions, trade shows, conferences, etc.

The Al Green Theatre is the host to a number of cultural arts events including theatre, music, dance, film, and literature. These events reach out to audiences of various ages, cultures, and demographics. Every year, over 25,000 audience members enjoy programs on the stage.

Project Summary

From November 2017 to September 2019, the MNJCC underwent a capital project that incorporated several accessibility upgrades to the Al Green Theatre. With a budget just under \$700,000, the project touched on four components that would prove to have a major impact on the accessibility of their space. The project upgrades addressed accessibility of the stage, seating, the venue itself and related technology. The project was sparked into action by a private donation, which enabled the project team to address facility upgrades they had been contemplating for years, and the recommendations of a community advisory committee on accessibility and inclusion, and a 2016 building accessibility audit.

The “What”

What was the MNjcc building and creating?

The focus of the capital project was to make the Al Green Theatre a more accessible venue. Based on the feedback they received from patrons, and the depreciation of assets that had occurred over the past few years, the need to upgrade their venue became clear.

The renovations addressed four main points;

Stage Accessibility:

In order to make the four-foot high stage accessible, purchased a non-electric portable stage lift that can be hand-cranked up onto the stage. In addition, a portable ramp was purchased as an alternative way to access the stage.

Seating Accessibility:

The seating was completely replaced with a modular system that includes the ability to remove the front row of chairs to incorporate patrons in wheelchairs as well as their companions. Their new modern and comfortable telescopic seating system is easier to manoeuvre, and offers eight additional accessible seats and companion seats on the main level.

Venue Accessibility:

In order to make all of the doors accessible in the theatre, lobby, and washroom, pushbutton access doors were installed to all eight theatre entrance doors in addition to the installation of pushbutton and light access to the door of the barrier-free washroom in the main lobby.

Accessible Technology:

Both hearing assist and visual assist technologies were included in the project. The radio frequency audio system, which is used to broadcast an audio signal from the technical booth to assisted hearing devices, was retrofitted to better enhance what was happening on stage, and the speakers were cleared

from the stage. They now hang in the theatre to provide more clear sound. In terms of visual assist technology, a 16-foot wide screen that comes down from the proscenium was installed, which can offer communication access via real-time translation (CRT) during performances.

What was the project timeline?

While the MNJCC was contemplating these upgrades for years, funding was confirmed in November 2017, and project was completed in September 2019.

The “Why”

Why did the MNJCC take on this capital project?

The MNJCC took on these renovations to address facility depreciation, respond to the needs of their community and reflect the spirit of inclusion outlined in their mission. Considering the Theatre was in its 14th year, assets within the theatre needed to be addressed. The seats needed to be replaced and some features were out-dated. With access and inclusion being a pillar in their strategic plan, these upgrades were made to ensure their space could effectively serve a diverse audience and support accessible programming.

By undergoing these renovations, the MNJCC recognized the many ways in which they could enhance the experience of audiences and performers alike while also investing in the revenue potential for the organization; as a result of expanding the facility to include more audiences of all abilities and attract a variety of artists and organizations to rent the space.

In order to best serve audiences and actors, MNJCC engaged users prior to renovations to determine how the space could better address the users’ needs. This included advisory councils and a community of practice around access and inclusion. An accessibility audit was also performed in 2016 for the entire building, and highlighted specific improvements needed in the Al Green Theatre that were addressed in the renovation project.

The “Who”

Who led the project?

The Internal Project team included:

- Ellen Cole, former Executive Director: oversaw the project and acted as liaison with the private donor and Canadian Heritage.

- Harriet Wichin, current Executive Director: oversaw the project and acted as a liaison with the building owners and some of the funders.
- Roslyn Kaman, Chief Operating and Financial Officer: managed the overall budget, cash flow and project audit.
- Angie Stillitano, Director of Booking Operations: initial project lead
- Peter Fehlhaber, Technical Director/Manager of Theatre & Bookings: acted as the project manager midway through the project. He was responsible for organizing bookings, sourcing equipment quotes, managing trades, liaising with contractors and managing the install schedule.
- Fallon Butler, Director of Development: responsible for managing grants, reporting and recognition.
- Julie Murphy, Facilities Manager: responsible for broader project management on aspects that affected the larger building.
- Liviya Mendelsohn, Director of Access and Inclusion: acted as the internal accessibility consultant.

Having a large project team proved to be beneficial for the MNJCC as it enabled a variety of expert voices to be present and offered different perspectives. While working as a collective, one person's line of questioning started to spark somebody else's, which led to more thought out plans.

Who was contracted for this project?

The contracted project team included:

- Accessibility Consultant: Bob Topping, DesignABL Environments
- Stage Architect: Red Studio Inc. Architects
- Seating Vendor: Forum Athletics
- Doors: Security Management Accesible
- Lift/ramp: Motion Specialities
- A/V: Apex Sound and Lights

The MNJCC did not go through a formal RFP process for their hired architect or vendors. The architect had done previous work for the organization, and the specialized nature of the seats meant that only a couple of companies in the province could take on the project. Similarly, there were a limited number of companies that could build the ramps needed for the stage. The team received quotes from all suitable companies and selected the best option. In terms of selecting a provider for accessible technology, the team consulted with internal and external accessibility consultants, and received three quotes from their preferred vendors.

Notably, consultant fees were considered in the initial phases of the project, and allocated for in the project budget.

Who supported the project outside of the MNJCC?

The main supporters of this project outside of the MNJCC include a private donor who sparked this project into action and supported it throughout, as well as the community advisory committee on accessibility and inclusion led by the MNJCC's Director of Access and Inclusion.

Who opposed the project?

As the project centered on accessibility and responded directly to the needs of its current and future users, the MNJCC did not face any opposition.

The “How”

How did the project go from concept to construction?

While MNJCC had been contemplating these upgrades for years, it was ultimately a private donation from a long-time patron that sparked the project into action. With this donation, the MNJCC had matching funds that could be leveraged in their application to the Canada Cultural Spaces Fund, and resulted in a successful grant application.

As these renovations had previously been considered by the MNJCC, they had done a significant amount of preliminary planning and research. The organization had an ongoing capital improvement spreadsheet with projections on what each renovation project would entail, how long the project would take, and some previous quotes from contractors. This planning proved to be extremely beneficial, enabling the organization to move on the projects as soon as the funding came through.

How was the construction plan formed?

Before establishing a plan for construction, the ownership of the building had to be consulted. As the MNJCC is owned by the 750 Spadina Avenue Association, whose board is made up of representation from the MNJCC and the United Jewish Appeal (UJA), both parties had to approve any significant changes to the building. Once they identified the scope of the project and approval was granted, the project could move forward.

As the project was a team effort, each department was included in project plans. Decisions around project plans and execution rested with the Executive Director. Financial input was provided by the CFO, and the Director of Development provided insight on what was outlined in the supporting grant. These were all brought to the project lead and MNJCC Facilities Manager who in turn brought in contractors who identified what was possible in this building, and how it could be carried out.

When determining the construction plan, the team began by addressing larger upgrades that would have the most impact. For this renovation project, creating an accessible stage, seating, and entrances were the top priorities, and were the first to be completed. Once the team learned more about the expenses of the upgrades, they were able to move on to smaller aspects of the renovation, and effectively budget and plan for them. The schedule was established based on a combination of working around the existing theatre schedule and deadlines identified in the grants.

How were contingencies managed?

When the project began, different departments within the MNJCC and aspects of the project were executed in isolation from each other. Coordination proved to be challenging for the project team, which led to timelines being shifted and construction being delayed. When an issue with the configuration of the seating arose that impacted meeting the most up-to-date accessibility standards (clearance of cross-aisles and options for accessible seating placement), the construction schedule had to be altered and the seats had to be installed in two phases to accommodate the theatre's booking schedule. To promote effective coordination and communication for the remainder of the project, Peter Fehlhaber, Technical Director, took on the role of project manager for the team.

For this capital project the MNJCC included a 10% contingency fund for any unexpected expenses, and incorporated a two-week buffer for any unexpected variances in timeline. In order to address as much of the accessibility needs within the project and leverage the funding available, they remained flexible and considered less expensive and more straightforward equipment to ensure key elements of the project, such as stage accessibility, were executed. The project was completed within budget.

How were day-to-day operations and organizational capacity impacted?

As this capital project was cross-departmental, many staff members who were involved and the renovations saw an impact to their daily workload. The MNJCC had also begun to get a better understanding of some of the outside support they needed to complete the project and started to bring in more consultation and outside expertise as they were identifying the need.

How was the project funded?

The \$629,000 project was funded through federal, provincial and municipal grants, as well as a private donation.

- \$210,000 came from a private donor
- \$225,000 was allotted by the Department of Canadian Heritage's Canada Cultural Spaces Fund
- \$150,000 came from Ontario Trillium Fund
- \$44,244 was provided by the City of Toronto

While the MNJCC did receive a line of credit to ensure they had enough cash flow for the project, they did not need to spend it.

The “Ongoing”

How were finances projected for the newly renovated theatre?

As the renovations were recently completed, the organization is still working on their projected financials for the upcoming year. The MNJCC intends to use the newly installed screen as a way to expand programming and revenue potential. As the screen is at the front of the stage, they may be able to offer film screenings or lectures during the day, while a set remains on the stage for rehearsals and ongoing productions in the evenings.

How will the facility be maintained?

The organization maintains a spreadsheet that highlights facility needs or renovations. The MNJCC charges a 4% capital and infrastructure improvement fee which is included in programming and rental pricing. These funds are distributed throughout the MNJCC to support building upgrades as well as infrastructure systems such as technology or security.

What lessons were learned?

The major lesson learned was the importance of having a designated project manager on behalf of the organization. In hindsight, having one individual identified at the beginning, whose sole responsibility is managing the project, would have provided an overall cohesiveness to the project. Plans and schedules are more efficient, and issues can often be caught earlier.

Secondly, the MNJCC recommends hiring an accessibility consultant on all capital projects. In order for accessibility to be truly integrated into a facility and the organization’s offerings, the consultant can identify how to effectively complete the project to meet accessible needs as well as the building’s needs and ensure code compliance.

Similarly, it is recommended to hire out what you do not know. Often times non-profits are too preoccupied with budgeting and the bottom line, that they do not hire the necessary professionals outside of their organization. While the need to complete a project on time and on budget is often pressing, the project being undertaken and its contribution to the sustainability of a facility is crucial for long-term growth.

Another recommendation would be to allow more time in the process for community and user consultation.

The MNJCC’s thoughtful planning contributed to the success of their renovations in the AI Green Theatre. By working in phases based on accessibility priorities, they were able to achieve their main objectives for the project and address even more accessible needs, such as sound equipment, the

screen, doors and lighting. Finally, requesting quotes and researching vendors before having the means to execute the project meant that they were able to react to the funding as soon as it was made available.

Case Study Summary

With the goal of creating an accessible and inclusive space for a variety of users, the MNJCC took on a multi-faceted capital project that resulted in significant upgrades to the AI Green Theatre. By ensuring an accessible stage, increasing accessible seating and upgrading accessible technologies, the centre is able to further their programming and fulfil their mission of providing an inclusive and welcoming community hub. In what was truly a collaborative effort, the project team's preparation and thoughtful consideration of audiences led by consultation, resulted in a successful capital project with access and inclusion at its core.

Resources

The following resources below have been provided as additional information for readers.

Websites:

- [Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre](#)
- [Al Green Theatre](#)
- [DesignABLE Environments](#)
- [Red Studio Inc. Architects](#)
- [Motion Specialities](#)
- [Apex Sound and Lights](#)

Documents:

Media:

- [Forum Athletics Article on Seat Renovations](#)