**Recommendations from the Alliance of Arts Councils of Ontario to the Ontario Government**

**2023 Pre-Budget Consultations**

February 8, 2023

**Who We Are**

We write to you as the members of the Alliance of Arts Councils of Ontario (AACO), a provincially registered not for profit organization with more than 30 municipal and regional arts councils, community arts councils and artists’ networks from across Ontario. We collectively represent tens of thousands of artists, hundreds of local arts organizations of every size and discipline delivering arts and culture programming and services in their communities, cultural workers and arts groups in every discipline, their volunteers and audiences.

We are dedicated to the ongoing advancement of the sector, and particularly at the moment, to providing projects and initiatives that will ensure a robust post COVID - 19 pandemic recovery and provide the foundation for the sustainable future of the arts and culture sector in the Province of Ontario.

Our immediate priority is to continue to sustain and rebuild our arts communities, our regions, and our province, ensuring ongoing resiliency.

**What We Do**

AACO is an association of the leaders of the groups outlined above. We meet monthly to share knowledge and information, provide peer support, explore new ideas, organize professional development opportunities, and undertake research and advocacy initiatives that support the health and wellbeing of the arts sector locally and across the province.

**Introduction**

In this brief, we recommend policy and investment options that will ensure the continued and ongoing rebuilding, sustenance and resiliency of Ontario’s arts and culture sector leveraging its benefits for health, tourism and continued economic growth.

Our aim is to continue to invest the works of local artists and the broader arts sector:

* To maintain access to the artists and arts workers who power our work, to breathe life into the communities we live in.
* To inform and educate key stakeholders and community members of the various ways the arts intersect with other aspects of daily living in a critical and crucial manner.
* To build on the successful digital experimentation and new collaborations – domestic and international – that our members and the arts sector in general have undertaken during the pandemic.

We are deeply grateful for the ongoing support the sector has received from the Province of Ontario as we continued to work tirelessly to support local artists generating paid, meaningful work, while ensuring that the broader communities and individual sectors were able to lean on the arts for their respective recoveries.

While the sector has stepped up, time and time again, to continue to deliver vital arts programming to our communities and meet its commitments despite the lockdown measures, we do require additional ongoing support. As you well know, arts and culture are an important part of the provincial economy, directly contributing $25 billion annually and representing 3.3% of the GDP.i

These important contributions are at risk, especially as arts businesses and organizations were among the last to fully reopen. More so than other sectors, 41.4% of businesses in the arts, entertainment, and recreation fields have seen obstacles (outlined in our previous briefs) with attracting new or returning customers over the last quarter of 2022. This is the largest expected obstacle for 2023, closely followed by 38.5% of businesses expecting rising costs of inputs to be their largest obstacle.ii

Our recommendations are focused on addressing both the short-term needs, as well as continuing to strengthen the foundation for the sector to rebuild, enhance its resiliency, and continue to contribute to the economy in Ontario.

**Recommendations**

The Alliance of Arts Councils of Ontario is proposing the following eight recommendations:

**1. Invest an additional $35M in annual funding to the Ontario Arts Council:**

As both inflation and Ontario’s population continue to grow, it is critical that the base funding for the OAC grows accordingly. By bringing base funding up to $95M annually, the OAC can continue to ensure the short - and long - term recovery and success of the arts sector in Ontario. The organization’s established and credible processes for disseminating funds, including through the use of peer assessment, should be relied on so that the arts community can ensure the best possible use and maximization of every dollar.

Special funding must be available based on need and quality of performance as restricting support based on budget size disadvantages newer and smaller arts organizations who desperately need assistance.

**2. Continue delivering targeted Indigenous, Black, Peoples of Colour and Disability support funding to the OAC**

While last year’s one-time funding for the Arts Recovery Support Fund, Indigenous Arts Fund, and Career Catalyst: Project Grants for New Generation Artists was deeply appreciated and helped so many artists reconnect with audiences and work towards recovery, the pandemic continues to have a significant negative impact. We recommend permanent commitment to these programs. These funds should continue to be designed and delivered through the OAC.

**3. Enhance Access for Arts Organizations to the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF)**

While we appreciate the creation of the Resilient Communities Fund, it has been difficult for arts and culture organizations to access the Fund and other grants, relative to other sectors. We recommend that the government provides OTF with enough funding and confirms that there are appropriate processes in place to ensure arts and culture organizations can be successful in applying for grants. In particular, organizations that have been fiscally responsible in establishing modest reserve funds are penalized in the application process, even though those reserve funds may be locked-in investments are not immediately accessible by organizations in the short-term.

**4. Support the Mental Health of Ontarians through the Arts**

Studies around the world, including those by UNESCO, clearly demonstrate that the arts are integral to ensuring good mental health in multiple populations including youth, seniors, and people living with mental and physical disabilities. Never was this made more clear than during COVID when citizens, locked down in bubbles everywhere, turned to books, music, movies, and live-streamed events to keep their spirits up, relieve stress, and build connections. Programs that support artists to create and present new work are crucial to providing a rich landscape of cultural experiences that support good mental health.

Furthermore, these studies reinforce that the arts play a crucial role in boosting and maintaining positive mental health. Indeed, the Hon. Michael Tibollo, Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions spoke about this fact during the first Arts for Mental Health Conference in Canada in October 2021.iii Many Ontario artists specialize in working directly with individuals to improve mental health.

As the pandemic and its impacts continue to be felt by Ontarians, we recommend the government deliver further investments in arts organizations, and create a specific program of support for artists and organizations who are delivering programming and support for the mental health of Ontarians.

**5. Enhance or Develop Programs of Support through the Ministry of Education**

To ensure a cross-government approach to pandemic recovery and the rebuilding of the sector, and support our recommendation around mental health, we recommend that the Ministry create programs of support for the arts, such as visiting artists or artists-in residence for schools at every level in Ontario’s education system. 97% of Ontarians agree that engaging children in the arts is important to their overall development.iv

**6. Expand Eligible Expenses in Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries and Other Funding Programs**

Currently, there is a significant amount of focus within funding programs on marketing and communication spending. While this is an important component of what arts organizations do, there are now more cost-effective, digital options for marketing that can ensure more funding is available to support individual artists and artist fees. We recommend the government, across its Ministries, allow funding recipients to claim expenditures on artists and artists fees, and reduce the focus on marketing and communications spending.

**7. Address Precarity in the Sector by Supporting a Federal Basic Income Guarantee**

Sufficient investments to reduce poverty and stabilize precarious workers will result in significantly greater economic contribution and participation, increased innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship while reducing social services spending. Working toward a Federal-Provincial Basic Income partnership will accelerate these trends and will be a necessary strategy to reduce Ontario’s deficit, and rebuild the economy, as we recover from the COVID-19 crisis.

This should include advocating and working with the Federal Government on the development and implementation of a Basic Income Guarantee; shifting existing provincial income support systems toward Basic Income principles that require less conditionality and provide recipients with more autonomy; and implementing an Ontario Basic Income demonstration program targeting low-income artists, gig-workers, and other precariously employed Ontarians for inclusion.

**Ontarians Value the Arts, and the Arts are Valuable for Ontario**

We know that the people of Ontario care for and value the arts in their communities. In survey after survey, Ontarians demonstrate that they favour provincial support for the arts, believe the arts are important for their quality of life, and see that arts and cultural activities are critical for economic well-being.iv The arts help drive tourism efforts, boost mental health, and help create the conditions that communities need to thrive.

As the rising costs of goods and inflation continues to impact the lives of people in Canada, the arts sector remains in an incredibly precarious position. We need continued government support in the short-term, as well as investments into the long-term sustenance of the sector.

But we don’t expect the government to do all of the heavy lifting – we will be there, at your side, working to implement these recommendations and deliver the programs and services that Ontarians need to lift them up in these challenging times. The Alliance of Arts Councils of Ontario remains committed to this work, and we strongly believe these recommendations will not only benefit artists and communities, but also Ontario as a whole.

We thank you for your consideration.

*Sources*

*i. Provincial and Territorial Culture Indicators, 2017 (product perspective), Statistics Canada, 2019*

*ii. Canadian Survey on Business Conditions, fourth quarter 2021, Statistics Canada, 26 November 2021.*

*iii. Media Release: Mississauga Arts Council and Mass Culture’s Arts for Mental Health Conference provides hope for ArtsCare, Mississauga Arts Council, 15, October 2021. iv. Impressions of the Impact of the Arts on Quality of Life and Well-Being in Ontario:*

*vi.Ontario Arts Council Survey Findings, by Nanos Research for the Ontario Arts Council, March 2017, and Arts and Heritage Access and Availability Survey 2016-2017, Environics Research Group, March 2017.*

*iv.* [*https://www.arts.on.ca/research-impact/impact-of-the-arts-in-ontario*](https://www.arts.on.ca/research-impact/impact-of-the-arts-in-ontario)

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Algonquin Arts Council

Arts Council - Haliburton Highlands

Arts Council - Windsor & Region

Arts Council of Northumberland

Arts Etobicoke

Arts Network Ottawa / Réseau des arts d'Ottawa

Arts, Culture & Creative Industry Development Agency

Chatham-Kent Arts & Culture Network

Conseil des arts Prescott Russell Arts Council

Electric City Culture Council

Guelph Arts Council

Hamilton Arts Council

Headwaters Arts

Haliburton Highlands Museum

Le Conseil des arts de Hearst

Kingston Arts Council

London Arts Council

Markham Arts Council

Mississauga Arts Council

Arts Council of Northumberland

North Perth Arts and Culture Council

North York Arts

Ottawa Arts Council

Prince Edward County Arts Council

Quinte Arts Council

Scarborough Arts

Scugog Council for the Arts

Smiths Falls and District Arts and Culture Council

Sudbury Arts Council

Toronto Arts Council

Town of Shelburne

Tweed and Area Arts Council

UrbanArts

Wallaceburg and District Council for the Arts

Westport Arts Council

York Region Arts Council

Your Arts Council Cornwall