

Recommendations from the Alliance of Arts Councils of Ontario to the Ontario Government 2022 Pre-Budget Consultations

January 26, 2022

Who We Are

We write to you as the **Alliance of Arts Councils of Ontario (AACO)**. Our organization includes more than 30 municipal and regional arts councils, community arts councils and artists' networks from across Ontario, who 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 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 rebuild our arts communities, our regions, and our province, ensuring on-going 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

Even in the midst of the current wave of COVID-19 infections that has once again required many arts and culture organizations to close their doors or significantly reduce their capacity, we remain thankful for the investments and initiatives of the Provincial Government to support our sector.

In particular, we are deeply grateful for the \$25 million that was invested into the Arts Recovery Fund for organizations that receive operating funding from the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) and have budgets of \$1 million or more, as well as the \$5 million that was invested in the Careers Catalyst program for New Generation artists and the Indigenous Arts Support program to support individuals, groups, and organizations. These investments have been critical lifelines for so many artists, arts workers, arts organizations, and communities across Ontario.

We are also appreciative of the announcement of the new Ontario Business Costs Rebate Program to help support eligible organizations with certain costs they bear while public health restrictions are in place this winter. Finally, we continue to applaud the leadership demonstrated by Minister Lisa MacLeod and her team, as well as for their efforts to keep our sector updated and seek our feedback when appropriate.

Despite these supports, the COVID-19 pandemic and necessary public health restrictions continue to pummel the arts and culture sector. 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 supports. Artists are losing concerts, exhibitions and acting opportunities, box office sales are plummeting, and fundraising events are evaporating. Financial stress and ongoing uncertainty are the daily reality for this vital yet precarious sector.

As you will 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 are expected to be among the last to fully reopen and recover. More so than other sectors, 41.4% of businesses in the arts, entertainment, and recreation fields expect obstacles with attracting new or returning customers over the first quarter of 2022. This is the largest expected obstacle, 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 of the sector, as well as continuing to build a strong foundation for the sector to rebuild, enhance its resiliency, and contribute to the Ontario economy for decades to come.

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 at least \$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 arts organizations in smaller cities and rural areas who desperately need assistance.

2. Continue delivering targeted COVID and Indigenous 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 a new round of funding to each program as well as making annual funding to the Indigenous Arts Fund a permanent commitment. These funds should continue to be designed and delivered through the OAC.

3. Continue to Invest in Cultural Infrastructure

The pandemic has taught us that modern HVAC systems, Personal Protective Equipment, and other COVID-19 related renovations to facilities are crucial for the safety of staff and audiences. Small and mid-sized arts facilities continue to struggle to afford these costs, and yet they are absolutely critical to accelerate the return of audiences, boost tourism, and ensure that the economic spin-offs from the sector can re-invigorate municipalities across the province.

4. 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 and not immediately accessible by organizations in the short-term.

5. 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

that 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.

There is already much evidence 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.

6. 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.

7. 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 certainly 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.

8. 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 pandemic continue to drag on, 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 recovery and rebuilding 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:

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.

For further information, contact:

Patti Broughton, Guelph Arts Council - AACO Co-Chair
executivedirector@guelparts.ca

Janet Jarrell, Quinte Arts Council – AACO Co-Chair
janet@quinteartscouncil.org

Alliance of Arts Councils of Ontario:

Algonquin Arts Council
Arts Council - Haliburton Highlands
Arts Council - Windsor & Region
Arts Council of Algoma
Arts Council of Northumberland
Arts Etobicoke
Arts Network Ottawa / Réseau des arts d'Ottawa
Chatham-Kent Arts & Culture Network
Le Conseil des arts de Hearst
Conseil des arts Prescott Russell Arts Council
Electric City Culture Council
Guelph Arts Council
Hamilton Arts Council
Kingston Arts Council
London Arts Council
Markham Arts Council
Mississauga Arts Council
North Perth Arts and Culture Council
North York Arts
Ottawa Arts Council
Prince Edward County Arts Council
Quinte Arts Council
Scarborough Arts
Smiths Falls and District Arts and Culture Council
Sudbury Arts Council
Thunder Bay Arts
Toronto Arts Council
Tweed and Area Arts Council
UrbanArts
Wallaceburg and District Council for the Arts
Westport Arts Council
York Region Arts Council
Your Arts Council Cornwall