



ALLIANCE OF ARTS
COUNCILS OF
ONTARIO

20
24

ASO SYMPOSIUM: PATHWAYS TO GROWTH

INSIGHT

REPORT

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Executive Summary

Enhancing Collaboration and Sustainability in Arts Councils

The ASO Symposium: Pathways to Growth, organized by the Alliance of Arts Councils of Ontario (AACO) and supported by the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) brought together arts councils across the province to explore challenges and opportunities in the sector. Facilitated by **Annalee Adair, Executive Lead, Evoke Culture 2.0**, using the Outcome Mapping methodology, participants focused on collaboration, resource optimization, and sustainability. The symposium was structured into three main sessions:

- 1. Outcome Mapping and Interest holder Identification:** Participants learned how to map key interest holders, such as artists, funders, and policymakers, and distinguish between boundary and strategic partners.
- 2. Defining Outcomes and Action Plans:** Using the Outcome Ladder, participants defined behavioural changes at different stages and set SMART goals to guide their initiatives. This included creating detailed action plans with specified roles and resources.
- 3. Collective Outcome Mapping for AACO:** The final session focused on aligning individual service organization outcomes into a shared impact map, fostering regional inclusivity, cross-service organization partnerships, and collective advocacy.

The symposium highlighted key strategies for growth, such as overcoming internal competition, optimizing resources, and ensuring sustainable revenue models. Tools like the Outcome Ladder and Shared Impact Map were introduced to help measure progress and align efforts. Overall, the symposium aimed to build a unified, sustainable arts network that enhances Ontario's cultural and economic identity.

Background and Context

The **ASO Symposium: Pathways to Growth**, organized by the AACO, aimed to address the pressing challenges and unlock opportunities for collective growth within Ontario's arts sector. This initiative emerged in response to evolving cultural dynamics, resource constraints, and the growing need for arts organizations to demonstrate their value to funders, policymakers, and the public. The symposium sought to create a unified approach for arts councils to navigate these challenges, optimize resources, and sustain their operations.

In preparation for the in-person symposium held in October 2024, a series of virtual sessions were hosted in June 2024. These virtual sessions helped shape the structure and focus of the in-person event, allowing participants to begin discussing key issues, set initial goals, and identify collaborative opportunities.

The symposium highlighted key strategies for growth, including overcoming internal competition, optimizing resources, and ensuring sustainable revenue models. Tools like the Outcome Ladder and Shared Impact Map were introduced to measure progress and align efforts. Overall, the symposium aimed to create a unified, sustainable arts network that enhances Ontario's cultural and economic landscape.



David Hudson and
Megan Divecha

Goals of the Symposium

The symposium aimed to achieve three overarching goals:

1. **Enhance Collaboration Across Councils:** By bringing arts councils together, the symposium sought to reduce competition, foster a sense of shared purpose, and develop frameworks for collaborative decision-making. Collaboration would enable councils to pool resources, share knowledge, and amplify their collective voice.
2. **Optimize Resources and Build Capacity:** The symposium addressed the need for efficient resource use by promoting centralized tools, templates, and strategies. It also emphasized building the capacity of councils to manage volunteers, secure funding, and implement impactful programs.
3. **Demonstrate Collective Impact:** One of the core objectives was to help arts councils better articulate their value and contributions. By creating shared impact metrics and narratives, councils could strengthen their advocacy efforts, attract sustainable funding, and highlight the sector's role in enhancing community well-being.



Keynote speaker, Michael Murray CEO of
the Ontario Arts Council...

Rationale for a Collective Approach



Arts Service Organizations by age in Ontario

The Arts Alliance of Ontario (AAO) plays a crucial role in addressing the absence of provincial leadership in the arts sector. As a collective body, the AAO provides a unified voice for the arts across Ontario, advocating for policies and funding that support the diverse needs of artists and arts organizations. This leadership is essential in bridging the gap left by the lack of a dedicated provincial arts authority.

Local arts councils and arts service organizations (ASOs) are vital in this ecosystem, representing the interests of artists, the sector, and their broader communities. They ensure that the unique cultural and artistic expressions of different regions are recognized and supported, fostering a vibrant and inclusive arts landscape across Ontario. By filling these gaps, the AAO and local councils work together to create a more equitable and sustainable future for the arts.

Introduction

Ontario's arts sector is a significant contributor to the province's cultural vibrancy and economic vitality. According to Statistics Canada, the cultural industries contributed approximately **\$28.5 billion to Ontario's GDP in 2022**, accounting for **3.6% of the province's total GDP**. The sector also supports over **276,000 jobs in creative fields**, demonstrating its economic importance. Beyond its financial contributions, the arts foster social cohesion, enhance community well-being, and provide platforms for diverse voices and stories to be heard.



**Cassandra Olsthoorn and
Janet Jarrell**

Despite these strengths, Ontario's arts councils face a range of systemic challenges that threaten their sustainability and impact. For instance, data from the Ontario Nonprofit Network (2023) indicates that **62% of nonprofit organizations, including arts councils, report facing significant financial challenges**, while 48% experience staffing shortages, often relying heavily on unpaid volunteer labor. Furthermore, regional disparities exacerbate these issues, as rural councils frequently contend with fewer resources and less access to funding compared to their urban counterparts.

Introduction

Continued

To address these issues, the Alliance of Arts Councils of Ontario (AACO) convened the "**ASO Symposium: Pathways to Growth.**"

The symposium aimed to foster collaboration, optimize resources, and strengthen advocacy to support the arts sector. A key element was the introduction of Outcome Mapping, a framework to plan and assess social impact by focusing on behavioural changes among interest holders.

The symposium sought to create a strengthened alliance to address the arts sector's needs and build a more resilient and unified arts community in Ontario. The report synthesizes the symposium's findings, providing data-driven insights and actionable strategies for a sustainable future.



Group shot from the reception gathering

Symposium Overview

The symposium was interactive and results-oriented, focusing on aligning individual service organization goals with provincial objectives. Over three sessions, participants engaged in workshops and collaborative exercises using the **Outcome Mapping** methodology to identify key interest holders, define desired outcomes, and create actionable plans.

Session 1 introduced Outcome Mapping, emphasizing behavioural changes for social impact. Participants identified two types of interest holders: Boundary Partners (e.g., artists, funders) and Strategic Partners (e.g., media outlets, educational institutions). They mapped these interest holders to foster collaboration and integrate underrepresented voices.

Session 2 focused on setting SMART goals and crafting action plans using the Outcome Ladder framework. Desired behavioural changes were categorized into three tiers: Expect to See (early engagement), Like to See (intermediate indicators), and Love to See (sustained changes). The Strategy Canvas was introduced to help define roles and allocate resources.



**Michael Trudgen and
Marion Meyers**

Session 3 aimed to align individual outcomes with AACO's collective goals. Participants developed a Shared Impact Map to demonstrate the broader value of arts councils. Key themes included resource-sharing, capacity-building, and advocating for the arts sector, with strategies to address regional disparities and ensure equitable representation.

Key Action Items & Strategies

Enhancing Collaboration and Sustainability in Arts Councils

1. Expand Earned Income Opportunities

Opportunity Statement: By embracing new revenue streams, councils can achieve financial stability, enabling long-term planning and sustainable growth.

Strategy & Actions:

- **Explore Revenue-Generating Partnerships:** Collaborate with tourism boards and local businesses for sponsorships and cross-promotion, fostering mutually beneficial relationships.
- **Identify Earned Income Models:** Develop a toolkit or workshop series to empower councils with innovative income-generating strategies tailored to the arts sector.
- **Leverage MAT Tax Funding:** Advocate for arts councils to receive annual funding equal to 30% of the Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT), providing a stable and predictable financial foundation.



ASO's working together

Key Action Items & Strategies

Continued

2. Strengthen Unity through Shared Research and Data

Opportunity Statement: A collaborative approach to data-sharing will enhance advocacy efforts and strengthen the collective voice of arts councils.

Strategy & Actions:

- **Centralize Data Collection and Sharing:** Establish a collective database where councils can share key insights, aligning efforts to achieve common goals.
- **Create Impact Templates:** Standardize templates for councils to effectively collect and present data, ensuring consistency in advocacy and reporting.
- **Facilitate Knowledge Exchange:** Organize regular forums or working groups to share trends, best practices, and innovative data utilization strategies.

3. Amplify the Value of Arts Councils

Opportunity Statement: Demonstrating the vital role of arts councils in economic and social development will lead to greater recognition and support from stakeholders. Tell your stories!

Strategy & Actions:

- **Develop Advocacy Toolkits:** Provide councils with ready-to-use templates, impact data, and case studies to effectively communicate their value.
- **Impact Data Collection and Storytelling:** Support councils in gathering compelling narratives and key metrics that highlight their contributions to communities.

Enhance Public Engagement: Design initiatives that showcase the essential role of arts councils in cultural and economic prosperity, strengthening connections with the public and policymakers.

Conclusion

These action items, developed through collaboration with sector experts and interest holders, will enhance financial sustainability, reinforce advocacy efforts, and elevate the recognition of arts councils. By implementing these strategies, the arts sector in Ontario will continue to thrive and make a lasting impact.

Highlight 1

Ontario's arts sector contributes significantly to the province's economy, generating approximately \$28.5 billion to Ontario's GDP in 2022 and supporting over 276,000 jobs.

Highlight 3

The ASO Symposium focused on collaboration, resource optimization, and sustainability, utilizing Outcome Mapping to develop strategies and action plans.

Highlight 2

Many arts councils face significant challenges, including financial difficulties (62% of nonprofits report this) and staffing shortages (48%), which are often exacerbated by regional disparities.

Highlight 4

Key action items include expanding earned income opportunities, strengthening unity through shared research and data, and amplifying the value of arts councils through enhanced advocacy and public engagement.

VISION: To build a unified, sustainable arts network that enhances Ontario's cultural and economic identity through collaboration, resource optimization, and amplified advocacy.

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**We thank you for
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