

Statement to SOCFEA on Culture, Heritage and Sport Sectors
Submitted by Alliance of Arts Councils of Ontario
July 6, 2020

We write to you as the newly formed **Alliance of Arts Councils of Ontario**. We are 18 municipal and regional arts councils from across Ontario, outside the GTA, who collectively represent thousands of artists, cultural workers and arts groups in every discipline and large and small businesses invested in partnering with the arts sector to rebuild our arts communities, our regions and our province.

We applaud the initiatives taken by the Provincial Government in its response to the COVID-19 crisis, and thank Minister Lisa MacLeod who tirelessly champions the value of the arts in Ontario during these challenging times.

We are grateful for the opportunity to share our recommendations that will directly impact the role the arts can play in the province's economic recovery. Arts and culture in Ontario directly contribute **\$25.0 billion** annually to the provincial economy, representing **3.3%** of Ontario's GDP¹. Provincial arts recovery support now will help our cities and regions as well. According to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, "arts, culture and heritage improve the ability of municipal governments to **influence local economic development** by attracting and retaining a skilled and talented workforce."

COVID-19 has devastated arts communities across Ontario. Like our colleagues in Culture, Heritage and Sport here in Ontario and across the world, we have been the hardest hit, with few options for short term recovery, and we are projected to be the last to be able to fully open or recover.

The arts sector is incredibly vulnerable to disruption. The risks and impact are equally devastating to large arts Industries as it is to small local galleries, theatres, and individual artists. Recovery for the arts, at all levels and in all parts of the province, is crucial to stabilizing and growing the cultural, and by extension provincial, ecosystem.

Minister MacLeod has challenged us all to imagine what Ontario could look like in 18 months. As we make plans for recovery, we can take this time to build a new future for Ontario's arts.

This is an opportunity for the arts sector to work together with local and provincial governments to reshape the sector, its infrastructure, and supports, so it can thrive and contribute even more to the social, mental and economic health of our province.

Recommendations

The **Alliance of Arts Councils of Ontario** are proposing the five following recommendations:

1. Development of **safety and health protocols** so the sector can safely reopen. We ask for partnerships between provincial and municipal public health authorities and arts organizations to provide support in implementing these protocols for arts organizations of all sizes.
2. Establishment of a **provincial stabilization fund**, administered and disseminated by the Ontario Arts Council, to keep artists and arts organizations working and to maintain activities during these uncertain times and recover from closures imposed by physical distancing.

We recommend this fund:

- be disseminated with an equity lens, giving consideration to marginalized artists and their organizations to benefit the recovery and sustainability of artists and groups in their communities;
- be open to members of the Ontario arts community who may not be current funding recipients of the Ontario Arts Council;
- be distributed across the province; and
- that eligibility not be contingent on financial hardship criteria.

This **provincial stabilization fund** will benefit the recovery and sustainability of artists and groups in their communities and can provide needed recovery support and fill gaps left by the current programs.

3. **Additional \$5 million to the Ontario Arts Council.**

These new funds will support the development and implementation of new models for a stronger sector led by Ontario's artists and arts organizations. These funds will support the rebuilding, renovating and reimagining of the sector. It will activate and spearhead opportunities for creative solutions to creating, producing and presenting art in a post-pandemic Ontario.

4. **Provincial task force for solutions to the reopening and rebuilding of arts, culture, heritage and sports sectors.**

Connect, at both provincial and regional levels, cultural representatives from all members of our broad sector. This is a unique opportunity for us to come together to develop and implement creative solutions to reimagine the culture, heritage and sports sectors.

5. **Marketing campaigns, incentives and support from local MPP's that encourage Ontarians to engage and connect with the arts in their community.** Just as local businesses need the support from local residents, and tourism needs the confidence and attendance of people beyond our borders, our local artists and arts organizations need their audiences, participants and communities to engage with artists, buy tickets, purchase art, take a class and make donations.

The ‘new-normal’ for local arts:

Minister MacLeod, our colleagues who have recently presented to this committee, and many others have rightly cited poll results that indicate the great jeopardy the arts sector is in.

We echo the statements that have been made by our colleagues in asking for supports for the arts to go online. There are many benefits to a greater online presence and new digital strategies, but it is not without its limitations. It is an exciting new avenue to showcase Ontario’s arts, but brings in little revenue or income to the creators. Any new initiatives for digital engagement must include clear revenues for arts and income for artists. These are incredible opportunities that the arts are taking advantage of to create and showcase Ontario’s artists. However, they are not sustainable replacements for what was lost.

Not every Ontarian can access the arts online. Given that artists already navigate on a limited annual income, there is an inequity with respect to artists having the tools and resources to engage online, and not every resident in Ontario has access to high speed internet. There must be resources put towards connecting Ontarians with the arts in their communities. Partnerships with public health, cross-sector solutions, and putting funding directly in the hands of local arts will achieve this.

The people of Ontario care and value arts in their communities. In 2017 a comprehensive Ipsos Reid poll revealed over 90% of Ontario residents strongly favoured Provincial support for the arts and saw them as crucial to their quality of life. Further, **88%** of Ontarians agree that arts and cultural activities are important to a community’s economic well-being².

Ontarians want arts where they live:

- **93%** of Ontarians believe that arts activities help enrich the quality of our lives³.
- **90%** of Ontarians agree that an active local arts scene helps make a community a better place to live³.
- **88%** of Ontarians believe that if their community lost its arts activities, people living there would lose something of value³.
- **92%** of Ontarians agree that exposure to arts and culture is important to individual well-being⁴.

We cannot stress enough the current precarity of the sector. The entire arts ecosystem needs support at this time: industries, tourism, and individual artists, nonprofit organizations and arts groups.

As a result of the global health crisis, Ontario Arts & Culture workers confirmed that close to 10,000 gigs were lost or at risk as of May 2020. This represents a potential revenue loss of \$9M in income, and an individual average of 24 gigs lost per artist. Further, the average financial loss per artist is \$22,400⁵. More than 440 Ontario arts organizations surveyed by the Ontario Arts Council in April estimated that they’d lose as much as \$128 million due to COVID-19—an average of 16% of their total annual revenue. Over 70% said they’d be laying-off employees. Without support

from the provincial government, we can only assume that follow up surveys over the summer will only reveal more losses in jobs, income and soon in organizations and venues shuttering.

It is the very nature of the arts, as a stimulating means of coming together, that puts us at such risk now. We thank the provincial government for this opportunity to be heard. We stand ready to support the recovery and rebuilding of our sector.

We are very concerned for the well-being of our arts community. Ontario artists have left an indelible mark on the cultural fabric of our province, making it a vibrant place for its residents to live and an attractive place for tourists to visit. And they've done this despite ongoing financial struggles common in the creative sector. The Alliance of Arts Councils of Ontario is committed to working with the province and Ministry on the steps toward recovery, and strongly believe these recommendations will have a positive and progressive impact on our arts communities. We urge the Standing Committee to share this view.

Signatories

Alliance of Arts Councils of Ontario:

Arts Etobicoke	Mississauga Arts Council
Arts Council Windsor Region	North York Arts
Arts Network Ottawa	Ottawa Arts Council
Electric City Culture Council	Prescott-Russell Arts Council
Guelph Arts Council	Prince Edward County Arts Council
Haliburton Highlands	Quinte Arts Council
Hamilton Arts Council	Scarborough Arts Council
Kingston Arts Council	York Region Arts Council
London Arts Council	

Sources

- 1 Provincial and Territorial Culture Indicators, 2017 (product perspective), Statistics Canada, 2019.
- 2 Statistics Canada, 2018
- 3 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.
- 4 Arts and Heritage Access and Availability Survey 2016-2017, Environics Research Group, March 2017.
- 5 I Lost My Gig Canada COVID-19 Impact Survey for Arts, Culture & Tourism Workers
- 6 Provincial and Territorial Culture Indicators, 2017 (product perspective), Statistics Canada, 2019.