

1. How will you and your government support the COVID-19 recovery efforts of arts organizations?

When we consulted with stakeholders from arts and culture sector, they pointed out three key challenges. Our platform addresses all three of them.

First of all, because of the loss of revenue many grassroots arts and culture organizations are not being able to pay for the spaces/locations/facilities where they do rehearsals or performance. In general, there is already a shortage of rehearsal and performance spaces for young talents and artists. The issue is even worse for artists and grassroots organizations from marginalized backgrounds. Therefore, an Ontario Liberal government will invest \$50 million to build, purchase or refurbish performing arts studios, visual arts galleries and event spaces etc.— being sure that this includes more spaces to feature work from Black, Indigenous and other artists of colour.

The second challenge is that many young talents are being forced to take on multiple jobs to make ends meet. At least in the beginning of their career, many of them do not earn enough from their creative work that they get compelled to take on side hustles. Problem is that, it hampers their creative growth. Because of being in need of taking on multiple jobs they can't spend as much time as they need, to excel in their artistic endeavour. The silver lining that they found in this pandemic is that during the months when they received CERB, they had the opportunity to concentrate exclusively on their creative work. They had income security which helped them focus more on improving the quality of their creative work. Ontario Liberal Party's plan to introduce a living wage, universal basic income demonstration (a demonstration is superior to a pilot), and portable benefits (that will cover the cost of prescription medicines, mental healthcare, dental care and vision care) will be of enormous support for young, emerging artists and creative workers. Local, grassroots organizations are the hubs of young talents and when our talented artists receive income security allowing them to invest more time on their projects delivering better outcomes, it ultimately benefits the arts and culture organizations to attract more customers and get access to more exhibitions, events and festivals.

The third challenge is that under the Ford Conservatives the Ontario Arts Council and Ontario Trillium Foundation have utterly failed to live up to the expectations that the people of Ontario have with respect to these agencies. One of the fundamental reasons is that the Boards of these two agencies were replaced with people who have little experience, expertise or involvement related to arts and culture sectors. Many of their decisions disproportionately benefitted the larger organizations and left little to no support for smaller organizations. Not to mention that Ford Conservatives also cut the funding for these agencies. Not only that we will reverse the cuts but also we will reform the agencies so that we can appoint qualified individuals with experience in the sector particularly ensuring appropriate representation of the marginalized and racialized artists and cultural organizations. We will further ensure that local, grassroots organizations receive a chance to influence the funding criteria and model so that those can be sensitive and responsive to the unique challenges that grassroots organizations experience.

In short, we will create more spaces for arts and culture organizations to practice and perform, will support artists to receive income security so that they can focus more on their creative work and have to worry less about putting food on the table, and finally reform the funding agencies that arts and cultural organizations rely on so that the funding criteria and model are equitable and fair.

2. What funding policies and programs do you propose to support the ongoing work of individual artists and arts organizations in Ontario?

First of all, the previous OLP government spent a considerable amount of time and effort to develop a comprehensive Ontario Culture Strategy back in 2016. While they made some progress to advance its full implementation, progress stalled over the last 4 years (unsurprisingly). A new Ontario Liberal government will ensure that we finish its full implementation.

The Ford Conservatives not only cut funding for Ontario Arts Council or the Trillium Foundation, but also for Music Fund, Indigenous Culture Fund and many other specialized programs that were created to support artists and cultural organizations. Many of these programs/funds were actually the creation of previous OLP government (such as the Music Fund and the Indigenous Culture Fund). We will reverse all of those cuts to ensure that artists and cultural organizations have the financial means to continue to explore their innovative ideas.

3. What actions would you and your government take to advance diversity, inclusion and equity for marginalized (including artists with disabilities and Deaf and hard of hearing artists), and racialized artists, including BIPOC (particularly Indigenous artists in our area) and 2SLGBTQ+ artists?

Arts and culture can be a source of good, a powerful force, and an agent of change to combat the rising wave of hatred and bigotry. However, for that to happen, artists from and cultural organizations that represent BIPOC, marginalized and racialized communities must have the involvement with the sector. Equity and inclusion must be at the heart of all of our plans, policies and programs on any issue but more specifically on arts and culture sector. Hence not only that we will ensure Ontario Arts Council or Ontario Trillium Foundation make it a mission for them to be more accessible to grassroots organizations that represent marginalized communities but also we will make additional funding available to make arts and culture sector more equitable. This is why we have a commitment to invest \$5 million for community organizations that work on representing Black voices including in the arts and culture sector. We will also invest \$20 million toward an 2SLGBTQ+ Action Plan that will involve supporting 2SLGBTQ+ artists and cultural organizations, Pride festivals and other events and initiatives that pave the way for more 2SLGBTQ+ artists to make their mark.

Ontario Liberal Party set a precedence and demonstrated their commitment towards building an equitable Ontario that will be a place to grow for everyone by hosting the most engaging consultation process to develop our election platform. What you see is the reflection of what we had the opportunity to hear from the people of Ontario and we tried to examine all policies that we put forward from an equity lens. Our platform is the culmination of the ideas and concerns shared by regular voters through 25 open forums, 500 consultation meetings with stakeholders from all walks of life and over 28,000 participants in online portal. In total, Ontarians submitted over 38,000 ideas and cast over 230,000 votes to create our platform. So while we have plenty of work to do to build a more equitable Ontario, we are taking some bold steps to achieve that goal. An Ontario Liberal government will carry on that commitment towards equity, diversity and inclusion specifically in the context of arts and culture sector.

4. What special initiatives might you propose to encourage and support artistic practice in smaller urban centres such as Peterborough and arts activity in rural areas?

Municipal arts and/or tourism action plans or strategies that are getting developed by many local municipalities (for example Brampton) recently are great ways to capture the uniqueness of the arts and culture landscape of a local community. Hence we will support municipal tourism and culture strategies as well as fund them to ensure their successful implementation.

If elected on June 2, I'll also collaborate with my Ontario Liberal colleagues to ensure that Peterborough and other smaller communities receive their fair share of the \$50 million that we have allocated to building new or repairing spaces for artists and cultural organizations to facilitate their rehearsal and performance.

Smaller, rural communities have their own unique stories to tell and dynamic landscape to feature. We will, therefore, strengthen film and TV tax credits so that producers become interested in taking advantage of the unique history, landscape and architecture of these areas.

Finally, the way we develop policies in the arts and culture sector and who we consult matter. Local arts and culture organizations have told us over and over again the biggest barrier to developing inclusive arts and culture policies and initiatives is the dominance and outsize influence of a few large stakeholders who also happen to represent urban audience more often than smaller, rural communities. Unless we make room for smaller organizations or grassroots initiatives/groups, there is no way we can make arts truly inclusive. We already have demonstrated our commitment towards widespread consultation prior to developing this platform and if elected as your MPP, I'll continue to fight for ensuring involvement of local arts and culture organizations from smaller communities in the decision-making process so that our policies are reflective of the diversity that makes Ontario unique.