



BRITISH COLUMBIA ARTS COUNCIL

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS AND PROPOSED
OBJECTIVES FOR THE BC ARTS COUNCIL



discussion document

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STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS AND PROPOSED OBJECTIVES FOR THE BC ARTS COUNCIL

discussion document

Introduction

This document was developed by the BC Arts Council to invite discussion among people and organizations involved with the arts in British Columbia. The Council requires feedback about how to respond to changing demographics, cultural profiles and artistic activities in the province. The document outlines the Council's efforts to identify strategic directions, objectives and potential activities that can increase its ability to respond to these changes.

The BC Arts Council was formed in 1996 to support the development and sustainability of arts and cultural activity in BC. It consists of up to fifteen members selected from across the province.

The Council currently administers programs in six areas:

1. Professional Arts and Cultural Development;
2. Community Arts Development;
3. Touring;
4. Arts Awards for Individuals;
5. Publishing; and,
6. Sustainability.

The organizations and individuals the Council supports have set standards of excellence in performance, production and presentation both within and beyond British Columbia. The Council must continue to support these achievements. It must also provide opportunities for new and emerging artists and art forms.

The Council looks forward to feedback from those who share its desire to balance present needs with future successes in artistic and cultural activity in British Columbia. Ideas that emerge from this discussion will help to influence the Council's future development.

Strategic directions



The BC Arts Council is a small but vital organization that has worked to facilitate the development of the arts and the artists in the province. In doing so the Council has attempted to ensure that its programs reflect the “face” of British Columbia.

The face of BC, however, is changing. To remain relevant and to support the evolution of the province’s arts and culture communities, the Council must continuously evaluate its activities. It must review its role with professional artists, and with established organizations that depend on Council contributions. It must also find ways to support emerging organizations and new artists in established and alternative artistic and cultural forms. The challenge of balancing these areas of support is considerable.

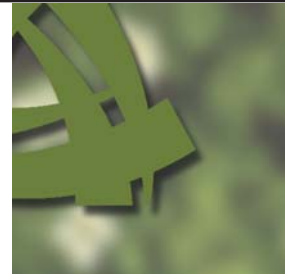
In response to this challenge, the Council has established two strategic priorities to help guide its efforts.

1. The Council must respond to change through its programs and operating procedures.
2. The Council’s activities must reflect the development needs of different geographic, artistic and cultural communities.

The Council has identified five objectives to inform these priorities. Over the coming years, the Council will strive to:

1. respond to the diversity of artistic and cultural practice in British Columbia;

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2. support new and emerging forms of cultural expression;
 3. support new artists and organizations working in established art forms;
 4. recognize the needs of a geographically diverse population; and,
 5. sustain BC's artistic and cultural infrastructure.



The Council has finite resources to meet these objectives and their guiding principles. Nevertheless, the Council must do better at reflecting the changing face of arts and cultural activity in BC.

This document includes background information, discussion points and potential activities linked to each of the Council's proposed objectives.

Objective 1

Cultural diversity

The BC Arts Council will respond to the diversity of artistic and cultural practice in British Columbia.



BACKGROUND

The majority of the Council's resources are currently used to nurture and sustain professional arts and cultural organizations. Some of these organizations have been in operation for many years and all have served the artists and audiences of British Columbia extremely well.

The potential range of cultural activity has increased as the composition of the province has become more varied and as recent immigrants have brought their cultural traditions to British Columbia. The 2001 Census indicates, for example, that more than 20% of British Columbians with a single ethnic origin identify Chinese or South Asian as their cultural heritage. The Council has limited contact with these and other cultural communities as well as the artists working within them. The extent of their potential need for support has not been clearly identified.

THE CHALLENGE

Council wants to support BC's expanding artistic and cultural potential without compromising existing initiatives.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- How can existing programs be modified to better address cultural diversity in BC?

Example:

- BC's Artists In Education and Community Presenters programs have supported the presentation of diverse cultural expression across the province. Their expansion and potential for future development needs to be explored.

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- What new programs would contribute to the Council's efforts to support diversity?

Examples:

- The Aboriginal Arts Development Awards program (AADA) was developed as an initiative to bring First Nations artists into established programs and to encourage the retention of traditional artistic practice. Today, it is successful as an independent program and continues to grow.
 - The AADA program required many years to establish. A multi-year plan could be considered to foster similar programs for artists working in other cultural traditions.
 - A central component of the 2010 Olympic Bid was the cultural and demographic diversity of the province. Diversity is expected to be a central theme in cultural programming related to the Olympic Games.
- How can the adjudication system be used to increase funding support to a broader range of arts and cultural activity?



POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

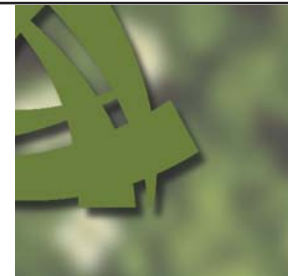
- Invest funding in the near term to better understand artistic practice in different cultural traditions.
- Make key Council information available in multilingual formats.
- Augment support to the Artists In Education and Community Presenters programs.
- Consider new and targeted Arts Development Awards programs.
- Focus project funding to support the development of culturally diverse initiatives.
- Request organizations receiving operating support to respond to diversity in programming and audiences.
- Provide funding to assist new or established organizations to undertake culturally diverse projects that involve financial risk.



Objective 2

New and emerging art forms

The BC Arts Council will develop the necessary flexibility to support practice in new and emerging forms of cultural expression.



BACKGROUND

The Council has finite resources and the majority of its support flows through “operating” and “project” funding programs.

Operating funds are presently used to support the infrastructure of a relatively small number of established organizations. Many organizations and programs that merit operational support remain in project funding—the Council’s most powerful tool to support innovation. The inability to move organizations from project to operating support limits Council’s ability to respond to new or largely unfunded art forms that would normally be supported first through project based assistance.

THE CHALLENGE

To assist new and emerging art forms, the Council must consider reorienting finite resources without risking investments in established artists and organizations.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- How can existing programs be modified to better support new and emerging forms?

Examples:

- Developing linkages between organizations receiving operating assistance and new or smaller organizations could increase movement and flexibility both within and between the Council’s funding categories.

- Project nesting, where a larger organization assists a smaller one in project development and production, or organizational mentoring could expose existing audiences to new work and provide development opportunities for new organizations and emerging art forms.



- What new programs would contribute to the Council's efforts to support practice in new and emerging forms?
- How can the adjudication system be adapted to ensure better support for new and emerging forms?

Example:

- Council could set measurable expectations for funded organizations in terms of mentoring, nesting and sponsorship. The Council would need to provide increased resources to funded organizations in order to support these expectations.

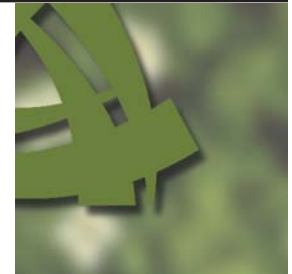
POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

- Promote nesting and mentoring incentives to utilize the talents, experience and infrastructure of established organizations that receive operational funding.
- Develop a "recommender" program that provides organizations with resources to identify and support innovative projects in these areas.
- Develop criteria that encourage established organizations to initiate or co-sponsor work in new and emerging art forms.
- Give budget priority to art forms that have developed more recently.

Objective 3

New artists in established art forms

The BC Arts Council will increase its funding flexibility in order to support new artists and organizations working in established art forms.



BACKGROUND

The Council directs significant support to sustain the work of established organizations and professional artists—individuals whose livelihoods are demonstrably linked to their artistic practice. Community based artists and artists working in recently established organizations receive comparatively little support.

With existing resources, the Council cannot currently provide adequate support for new artists and organizations.

THE CHALLENGE

The Council must review its balance of support for professional and emerging artists and organizations.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Can existing programs be modified to support new artists and organizations working in established art forms?
- To what extent should Council be responding to the demand to support new companies?
- Should the Council be more active in determining the number of organizations that it can assist rather than attempting to respond to the requests submitted to its programs?
- What new programs or alternative methods of support could contribute to the Council's efforts to assist new work?

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

- Consider nesting and mentoring incentives to leverage the infrastructure of established organizations that receive operational funding (as discussed under Objective 2). This would make new work available to existing audiences.
- Develop criteria that encourage established organizations to co-sponsor external projects.
- Establish a new artist/organization category to encourage development in this area.



Objective 4

Geographical diversity

The BC Arts Council will be sensitive to the different artistic and cultural needs that exist in a geographically diverse province.



BACKGROUND

The majority of funded organizations and artists are located in major urban centres. Some disciplines, such as museology and visual arts, tend to be less urban-centred than others, such as the performing arts.

Newly established organizations in less urban areas have difficulty obtaining consistent funding. Many individual artists outside major centres also have difficulty gaining recognition in larger markets.

For reasons of cost, expertise and availability, juries established by the Council are often composed of individuals from the Lower Mainland and Victoria. This may unintentionally influence material chosen for support.

THE CHALLENGE

The Council must review its balance of support between urban, southwestern British Columbia and the other regions of the province. It must also review its jury selection process.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- How can existing programs be modified to support artistic activity throughout the province?

Example:

- Council has developed the Artists In Education and the Community Presenters Assistance programs to promote regional and rural access to the work of professional artists. These programs currently account for less than 4% of the Council's funding.

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- What new programs would contribute to the Council's efforts to support the arts and artists across BC?

Example:

- The urban concentration of arts and cultural activities can be balanced by the support of touring and festival programs.
 - Community and regional arts councils use Council funds as seed money to encourage municipal support for community activity.
- How can the adjudication system provide for more funding support beyond southwestern British Columbia?

Example:

- Strict geographic equity could be achieved by setting regional or community funding envelopes applied either within or across disciplines. Adherence to a regional or community funding formula, however, would undermine excellence as the primary basis for adjudicating funding.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

- Expand the Artists In Education and the Community Presenters Assistance programs.
- Invest administrative resources to ensure stronger regional representation in Council processes and to increase the outreach activities of Council staff.
- Consider new touring and festival programs.
- Balance the use of excellence and participation in the adjudication system to accommodate smaller communities.
- Review the potential roles of community arts councils.



Objective 5

Cultural infrastructure

The BC Arts Council will sustain the artistic and cultural infrastructure that serves the people of British Columbia.



BACKGROUND

The artists and organizations supported by the Council provide outstanding cultural experiences for the people of BC. Like much of the art and cultural sector, however, established arts organizations remain fragile.

In the Council's efforts to reach out to new and more diverse populations, it must not adversely affect its commitments to established artists and organizations.

THE CHALLENGE

The Council must support new work and serve new cultural traditions without compromising established artists and arts organizations.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- How can existing programs and funding be modified to increase programming flexibility and mentoring services in a manner that enhances overall capacity? What additional resources would be required?
- Are there means, other than funding, through which Council can help existing clients to achieve sustainability?
- What new programs would contribute to the Council's efforts to preserve and enhance stronger infrastructure?

Example:

- Should new funding be used to support organizational development in regional and rural areas beyond Vancouver and Victoria?

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- Should the Council provide support for facilities that occasionally present arts and cultural programs? Its current inability to fund activities produced by organizations that are not primarily arts and culture based limits support to artists who may operate, for example, out of Friendship Centres.



POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

- Develop the potential of Council funds to leverage other resources.
- Recognize that the Council does not operate in isolation. Seek support from other funding partners.
- Encourage governments to consider tax-based incentive programs to assist artists and arts organizations.
- Consider an adjudication system that employs weighted criteria based on the Council's strategic objectives.

Next steps

1. Receive feedback from clients and other stakeholders about Council's proposed priorities and objectives.
2. Review existing programs and establish program priorities to guide future budget decisions.
3. Develop measurable targets to be achieved over the next three years.
4. Prepare a plan for securing the resources and partners needed to achieve the objectives that Council and its stakeholders have identified.



Conclusion

British Columbia has a remarkable creative history. Over a comparatively short period of time our artists and our arts and cultural organizations have established an enviable creative record. It is possible, however, that British Columbia's diversity, in all its forms, may represent a powerful opportunity to create a form of cultural expression that reflects the influences that have created our province and that will result in a unique and distinct provincial culture.

The British Columbia Arts Council believes in this possibility and hopes that this process of identifying priorities may be a way that we can assist our artists and organizations to define the creative voice of the province.

