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FOUNDATIONS

Strategic Plan
for the
British Columbia Arts Council

2018 – 2022



**BRITISH COLUMBIA
ARTS COUNCIL**

An agency of the Province of British Columbia



**BRITISH
COLUMBIA**

Supported by the Province of British Columbia



Territory Acknowledgement

The BC Arts Council acknowledges it carries out its work on the traditional territories of Indigenous nations throughout British Columbia. We pay our respects to the Elders, past and present, descendants and custodians of these lands. We honour the knowledge keepers and the continuing relationships with Indigenous people in B.C. that develop through our work together. The BC Arts Council thanks the Lekwungen speaking people and the Esquimalt and Songhees First Nations for allowing us to operate our main offices within their traditional territories.

MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER



I'm proud to present this visionary new plan for arts and culture in our province.

Creativity lives in B.C. Our government wants to keep it that way, working with partners like the BC Arts Council.

Our province has the highest number of working artists per capita in Canada. Arts and culture are essential to the character and well-being of our province, and support a creative and sustainable economy that works for British Columbians.

I'm excited that the BC Arts Council's new plan is dedicated to a diverse and accessible strategy which will ensure the vitality of arts and culture in all regions of our province, and in all communities.

Our government is committed to supporting and developing the next generation of creative talent to ensure artists always have a place in our vibrant creative economy. In 2017/18, my Ministry provided \$60 million in funding for individual artists and arts and cultural organizations, which has been increased to \$65 million in 2018/19.

I'm thrilled that our government provided the BC Arts Council with its first increase in funding in five years in the 2018 Budget – providing an additional \$15 million over the next three years. This year, the BC Arts Council will award \$29 million in grants to help B.C. artists and cultural professionals build a career in the arts.

As we look to the future, investing in creative thinking and skills development is important. As Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture, I understand how crucial it is to cultivate creativity in the next generation.

I applaud the BC Arts Council and everyone who has contributed to this excellent plan for the future of arts and culture in our province.

I look forward to the great things the Council will accomplish in the years ahead!

HONOURABLE LISA BEARE

Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

I am pleased to present the BC Arts Council's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan.

Strategic planning is a key responsibility of the appointed members of the BC Arts Council and this plan is a result of a year and a half of time, effort and dedication by both Council and staff. I would like to extend special gratitude to the Council's Strategic Planning Committee for their valuable counsel and leadership in developing this plan.

While the development of this plan began in early 2017, its contents represent a culmination of three years of consultations in the field, involving hundreds of artists and practitioners in regions and communities, both large and small, all across the province.

We are extremely fortunate in B.C. to be home to a vast number of artists and arts organizations, representing an enormous range of creative expression. In reaching out and listening to these communities, the Council recognizes that there is an opportunity for change. The result is a renewed commitment to our values and the development of four new strategic directions:

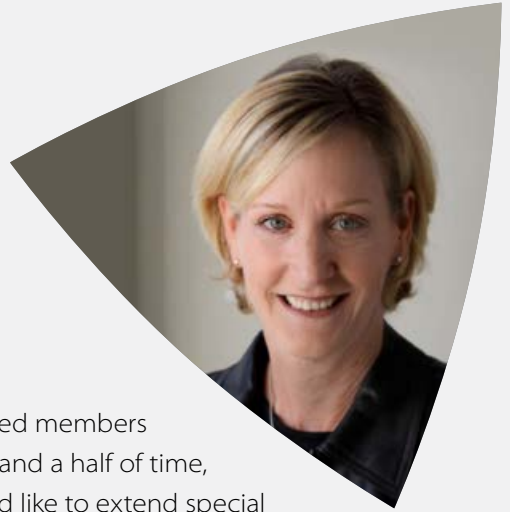
1. Sustainability and Creative Development
2. Indigenous Arts And Culture
3. Equity, Diversity and Access
4. Regional and Community Arts

We believe this approach will help ensure that the BC Arts Council's support for artists and arts organizations will create enhanced opportunities for diversity, innovation and public engagement. In implementing these new directions, we look forward to inspiring, and reaffirming, collaborations and shared partnerships with the arts and culture sector.

Together with a revitalized funding commitment from the Government of B.C., this Strategic Plan will guide the BC Arts Council over the next five years towards achieving our vision: a province where arts and culture are thriving, supporting community resilience and vitality, and engaging all the people of B.C.

SUSAN JACKSON

Chair of the BC Arts Council





new FOUNDATIONS

Strategic Plan for the British Columbia Arts Council

2018 – 2022


Arts and culture are an essential part of who we are, connecting, challenging and inspiring us. Our province celebrates the diverse artistic communities that build the vitality of our regions, enhance the quality of our lives, and contribute to our international reputation for creativity and diversity.



THE PATH FORWARD

British Columbia has the highest concentration of artists in Canada, representing a vast range of artistic and cultural expression. B.C. is home to the country's most ethnically diverse population. There are 203 distinct First Nations living in B.C., speaking over half of the Indigenous languages in Canada. This cultural abundance energizes B.C. arts and culture, animating the vibrancy and diversity of our communities and galvanizing our leadership in arts innovation throughout the world.

B.C. is at a unique cultural moment informed by a rapid transformation in social values related to equity, diversity, reconciliation and access, compelling arts and cultural organizations to re-examine their foundational principles. The resilience of Indigenous peoples in B.C. has led to a growing understanding of the importance of the right to maintain, control, protect and develop Indigenous cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, language and cultural expressions. Regionally-based artists and cultural organizations have made it clear that the artistic influences and demands in their regions are distinct and require appropriate consideration. Artists and cultural organizations seek new approaches to becoming sustainable and resilient, so that their creativity can thrive in a complex, dynamic environment. As the province's arts and cultural funding and development agency, the BC Arts Council has heard a clear message from our diverse arts and cultural communities: we need to reconsider how we support arts and culture at a fundamental level.



To achieve this, we will take a close look at how we do things. The BC Arts Council, alongside other long-standing arts and cultural organizations in the province, was founded on a European model of artistic excellence. We recognize that many of our practices and standards are colonial in nature, biased toward certain definitions of arts and culture. We are ready to seize the opportunity to increase the accessibility of our programs, decolonize our approach to arts funding and work to achieve greater equity in supporting arts and culture in B.C. We also need to support our artists and cultural organizations in becoming sustainable and resilient, so that all British Columbians can enjoy the benefits of and participate in vibrant arts and cultural communities.

This strategic plan is our commitment to begin a renewal process that will take time to grow and evolve. We will work in collaboration with artists, cultural organizations and communities. We will improve our peer review process, while ensuring its strong commitment to artistic expression, fairness and transparency. We will recognize that excellence is contextual and ever-changing, and that communities self-define what achievement, engagement and artistic value mean to them. Our role is to facilitate creation, connection and representation, ensuring that all people in British Columbia can access and enjoy the arts and celebrate culture.

This is our time to listen and respond to the diverse arts and cultural communities around the province, taking our lead from the inspiring work and advocacy that has long been developing. Through our critical self-reflection, we will review our practices and will learn from others' leadership to inspire and shape a bold transformation within our own work, becoming more equitable, accessible and relevant in how we serve arts and cultural communities in B.C.

THE BC ARTS COUNCIL

The BC Arts Council (the council, or “we”) was founded in 1995 through the *Arts Council Act* as an arms-length agency of the Province of British Columbia. Its main function is to provide grant funding to artists and cultural organizations throughout the province. Peer review adjudication is the cornerstone of the granting process, involving panels of artists and practitioners from arts and cultural communities that review applications, determine grant amounts and offer insights into policy development.

The appointed members of the council collectively set our strategic direction and inform program development, while the operational work of the council is led by the executive director and the secretariat, a branch of government staff housed within the ministry responsible for arts and culture. The council’s total budget is provided annually by the Province of British Columbia.

The BC Arts Council’s mandate is:

Providing support for arts and culture in British Columbia

Providing people and organizations with the opportunity to participate in arts and culture in British Columbia

Providing an open, accountable, and neutrally administered process for managing funds for British Columbian arts and culture

Our programs support arts and culture in over 220 communities each year, including:

Early career through senior artists

Indigenous artists and organizations

Community arts councils

Arts and cultural not-for profit organizations

Training, development and scholarships

All school districts

Unincorporated collectives

B.C. based publishing houses

Arts presenters across B.C.

National and international touring activities

Established and emerging artists across all artistic disciplines are supported by the council. We provide a range of project funding as well as core operating assistance for arts and cultural organizations. Through our partners, we also provide funding for arts touring and residencies in schools through ArtStarts in Schools; funding to support arts presentation through the BC Touring Council; a suite of programs through First Peoples’ Cultural Council (FPCC); and support for interactive digital media through Creative BC.

STRATEGIC PLAN BACKGROUND

Developing a better understanding of the pressures, needs and other circumstances facing the arts and culture sector began with a series of consultations with artists, cultural organizations and communities throughout the province over the past three years.

During our 2014 review of our core operating assistance programs, we met with 325 artists and practitioners in 12 communities across the province. Certain key issues surfaced, including: understanding regionality, increasing access through outreach, investing in capacity-building and empowering Indigenous artists and organizations.

In 2016, we partnered with FPCC to embark on consultations with Indigenous communities. The primary focus was a review of the four Aboriginal Arts Development Awards programs, and broader community feedback was also encouraged. We travelled alongside FPCC program staff to Williams Lake, Prince George, Vancouver, Chilliwack, Victoria, Courtenay, Tofino, Kelowna, Prince Rupert and Fort St. John, meeting with over 200 artists and knowledge keepers. These consultations identified the importance of increased support for training, mentorship, connections, spaces, promotion, engagement, and access within Indigenous arts programs, as well as the need for more funding.

The council considered these themes throughout 2017 and early 2018, supplemented by the feedback we regularly collect throughout our peer review process. A group of artists and administrators from across the province gathered with Minister Lisa Beare in December 2017 to identify strategic issues facing the arts and culture sector. “Reconciliation and Decolonization” and “Equity, Diversity and Inclusion” were identified as foundational priorities to direct future planning, underscoring the findings from our previous consultations.

In July 2017, the Minister was given a mandate to increase the investment in the council by doubling the budget over four years. This significant endorsement reinforced the importance of launching a strategic plan that reflects this unique moment in history for arts and cultural communities in the province. The strategies in this plan build on past strengths and acknowledge historical shortcomings while setting a path toward a vibrant and diverse vision for arts and culture within the province.

Values

Our values guide all of our decisions and activities, from program design to the peer review process. We strive for constant improvement under these values in how we serve artists and cultural organizations throughout B.C.

Artistic Development and Achievement

Supporting the development and achievement of diverse practices by artists and cultural organizations.

Indigenous Engagement and Cultural Vitality

Engaging with Indigenous artists and organizations guided by principles of cultural vitality and self-determination.

Equity, Access and Diversity

Striving for equitable access to arts and culture funding and programs for underserved artists, organizations and audiences.

Collaboration and Partnerships

Collaborating and co-creating with arts and cultural communities throughout the province to improve the council's programs and practices.

Engagement and Participation

Facilitating opportunities for all people in British Columbia to engage with and participate in arts and culture.

Recognition and Promotion

Improving access to and visibility of British Columbia's artists and cultural organizations locally, nationally and internationally.

Fair and Transparent Governance

Using fair and transparent processes guided by principles of accountability, independence, merit, and equity.

Vision

We recognize that this is the time to engage with artists and cultural organizations to transform how we do our work. Cultivating a progressive, collaborative approach to public arts funding requires a clear, bold vision. We will build on our foundation of fairness, transparency and engagement while critically reflecting upon how we have historically delivered funding. Collaboration and co-creation will ensure that our policies and programs are more responsive to the creative and cultural needs of the people we serve.

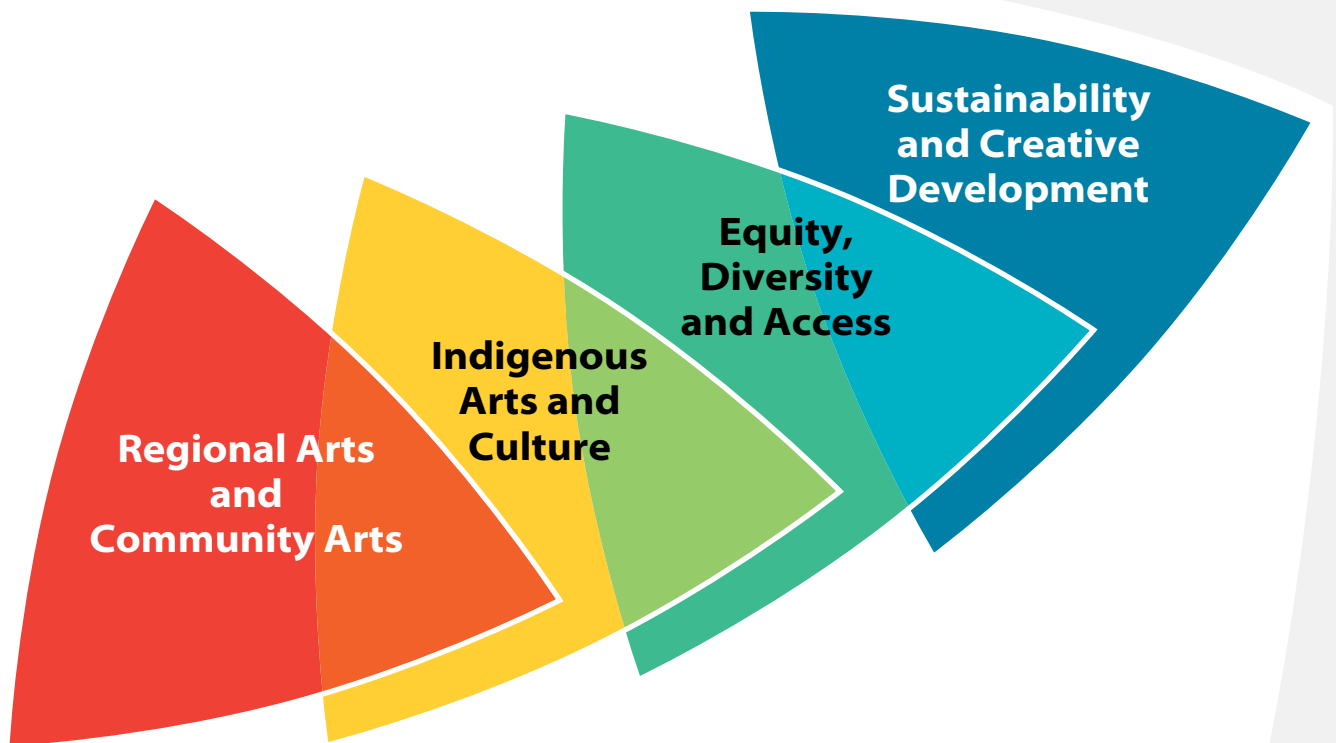
The following vision is aspirational – we will set our course toward this ideal with a commitment to the needs of arts and cultural communities across B.C.

“Artists and cultural organizations in British Columbia are well-supported, thriving, and able to reach their full potential under principles of equity, diversity, accessibility, and reconciliation. Arts and culture are seen as fundamental to developing vibrant and resilient communities, where the people of British Columbia are highly engaged in the province’s unique arts and culture sector recognized for its innovation and leadership in Canada and abroad.”

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Direction implies both intent and movement. While our intent is to facilitate more equitable access to arts funding, a sense of dynamic movement will develop through each of these strategic directions as we collaborate on actions alongside those most closely affected by them. Each strategic direction is informed by the current context facing the arts and culture sector in B.C. and the priorities we have heard.

The following pages describe our strategic directions and their overall aims, further defined by a series of supporting actions. The strategic directions intentionally intersect and overlap; they are designed to guide the council in all aspects of our work. While the strategic directions will inform future policy and program development, they are not intended to represent specific program streams. We will build an implementation plan to accompany these strategic directions, acting as our roadmap along the way.





Sustainability and Creative Development

Context

In our consultations with artists and cultural organizations, we have received a clear message that they are struggling to find the resources necessary to meet their creative goals. There is an urgent need for base-level funding that addresses the challenges artists and organizations face related to capacity, and supports their ability to create, experiment and innovate.

Commitment

We will build on our programs, bolstering support in much-needed funding areas to ensure that a diversity of artists and organizations are resilient, relevant and well-supported to build capacity and create.

Actions

- **Increase support for professional and organizational capacity-building and sustainability throughout the arts and culture sector. Amplify support for developmental opportunities for artists, arts administrators, and cultural organizations.**
- **Build awareness of the opportunities and challenges relating to new technologies, and build capacity in the arts sector to meet them.**
- **Encourage diverse forms of artistic research and experimentation.**
- **Expand support for underserved artists and organizations, including greater opportunities for accelerated advancement.**



Indigenous Arts and Culture

Context

The BC Arts Council currently funds the Aboriginal Arts Development Awards delivered through the First Peoples' Cultural Council and supports Indigenous arts and culture throughout our core programs. We have held this commitment to Indigenous arts and cultural vitality for many years, and yet, we are only beginning to understand the full extent of how our programs and policies reflect colonial perspectives. Meaningful relationship-building and collaboration with Indigenous communities, guided by the principle of self-determination, alongside critical reflection on the perspectives that inform our work, are necessary to effect change at a fundamental level. We are taking our lead from the recommendations and principles laid out by both the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to engage in purposeful decolonization.

Commitment

We will deepen our engagement with the processes of decolonization and reconciliation, taking our lead from Indigenous artists, organizations and communities and respecting the principle of self-determination.

Actions

- **Engage in partnership with Indigenous communities and organizations to inform policies and programs.**
- **Develop both dedicated funding and integrated policies that incorporate principles of reconciliation and accessibility into all programs.**
- **Improve awareness of eligibility and funding through outreach and partnership initiatives while improving access to programs.**
- **Enhance the support of Indigenous artists and cultural organizations, including both traditional and contemporary cultural expressions, as well as hybrid forms and experimentation.**



Equity, Diversity and Access

Context

While we have always encouraged diverse creative voices in our programs, an explicit commitment to equity, diversity and access requires critical reflection on patterns of inclusion and exclusion, particularly those that may be deeply engrained. Both unconscious bias and a tendency to support the familiar can result in reinforcing longstanding assumptions around arts and culture. We must focus on sustained and meaningful engagement with underserved communities to discover how we can best support artists and cultural organizations to ensure that all citizens see themselves reflected in the arts and culture of the province.

Commitment

We will improve access to our programs, building principles of equity throughout the organization at every level to better support meaningful and genuine forms of diversity. We will do this through collaboration and co-creation with underserved communities.

Actions

- **Strengthen engagement with historically underserved groups through increased outreach and communication efforts.**
- **Collaborate to discover new and improved ways that programs can be made more accessible and relevant, through both application and assessment processes.**
- **Review and improve organizational policies and procedures through an equity lens.**
- **Develop both dedicated and integrated funding strategies to better serve historically underfunded groups.**



Regional Arts and Community Arts

Context

We recognize that a significant amount of the available funding and programming goes to artists and cultural organizations in the province's urban centres and that many regional and community-based artists and organizations do not see themselves reflected in our current programs. We have heard clearly from regional, rural and remote artists, organizations and communities, including Indigenous practitioners, how the geographic diversity of the province influences the needs and context of their artistic and cultural practices. Support for professional arts in regional and remote areas needs to be more relevant and accessible. Similarly, community arts events and programs play an important role in promoting arts engagement and community vitality and have not been well-served by programs focused on professionalized practice. Increased support for both of these activities will benefit not only artists and cultural organizations, but the vibrancy of communities.

Commitment

We will focus on the diversity of both professional and community arts practices throughout the province, improving the accessibility and relevance of our programs.

Actions

- **Improve outreach and communication efforts across the province to increase our understanding of regionally-distinct arts practices and raise program awareness and accessibility.**
- **Develop policies and practices to increase the capacity of regional arts and cultural organizations and artists to allow for full and meaningful participation in BC Arts Council programs.**
- **Increase support for professional arts in non-urban areas, acknowledging the unique and diverse characteristics of regional arts.**
- **Increase support for community arts throughout B.C., recognizing their importance in developing and celebrating vibrant communities.**
- **Support organizations and artists across the province to promote engagement and enjoyment of the arts.**

NEXT STEPS

Implementation

We are developing an implementation plan to put the commitments of this strategic plan into action over the next five years, in collaboration with arts and cultural communities around B.C.

Next steps will include the following:

- Addressing the urgency of arts funding shortfalls through the funding increase indicated in the 2018/19 provincial budget;
- Reviewing of all council policies and programs under each strategic direction;
- Developing a plan to make the grant application process more streamlined and user-friendly;
- Developing a communications plan; and
- Developing new and enhanced programs and approaches that reflect the needs of the arts and culture sector.

Tracking Success

We will be dynamic and accountable both in our vision and actions, recognizing that some steps will be determined as we go along. We will provide updates on our progress and goals regularly, inviting feedback on the process throughout.


We will also develop measurements for our performance to remain accountable to our strategic directions, and will report out on what we've achieved, what we've learned and where we still need to go.



CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

British Columbia is a place where awe-inspiring nature, creativity, history, connection to land and place, and community define us. The BC Arts Council plays a key role in nurturing arts and culture within this province. We are faced with both the opportunity and responsibility to respond to what we have heard from artists and cultural organizations by becoming more responsive, relevant and accountable in all that we do. Decolonization and equity are at the heart of this work, and we intend to show leadership while continuing to listen to the artists and cultural organizations that have demanded change in order to move forward together.

Nothing serves to define or inspire us quite as intimately as our cultures and the arts. They reveal to us who we are, where we have come from, and who we want to be. We are looking forward to playing our role in moving towards a more equitable and creative future.





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