

# **Rural & Northern Arts Service & Ad Hoc Organizations in Canada**

A Status Report in Four Regions

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# Executive Summary

The impetus for this research was to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the contexts, capacities and workings of (primarily) small arts service organizations and ad hoc groups and collectives from, or working directly with, northern, rural and isolated communities in Canada. Our aims were to contribute relevant, community-level data, and to support the participating regions in developing interregional digital strategies for an underserved sector with uneven capacity, contexts and representation.

A survey, followed by conversation circles with leaders from the regions, identified key issues. A series of strategies were proposed that could help strengthen the arts sector in rural and northern communities and build relationships with funding organizations and communities. The strategies fall under the following categories of needs and responses:

1. Advocacy
2. Digital platforms
3. Shared services among arts organizations and inter-regionally
4. Development of good data practices, collection and metrics to better assess the arts sector
5. Storytelling
6. Municipal relationships, support and investments

# Project Leadership

Creative Industries North Bay Inc. (CI) is an arts service organization based in North Bay, Nipissing, Ontario. North Bay, Nipissing is situated in traditional Nibisiing Anishinabek territory on lands occupied by the peoples of Nipissing and Dokis First Nations whose treaty rights are within the lands recognized and protected by the Robinson Huron Treaty of 1850. CI supports artists, arts groups and organizations that operate in Ontario's northeast. Our region encompasses the southern boundary of Northern Ontario, with a small city of 54,000, small towns, First Nations and rural areas with an extended regional population of approximately 100,000. The arts sector has grown, with increased numbers of artists working as professionals; however, artists remain underserved in terms of access to training, exhibition opportunities, funding and public sector support.

Digital organizing and connections have been a key part of CI's operations since before the 2020 pandemic year. For artists and cultural workers in our region and other northern regions, online access has driven growth in the sector, enabling artists to build new communities and audiences outside the limits of geography.

# Research Context

The COVID-19 pandemic widely impacted (and continues to impact) the cultural sector. Artists and organizations have been affected in different ways, depending on their practices, regions, organizational and business models and funding relationships. In general, arts service organizations<sup>1</sup>, artists and cultural workers struggled to adjust during COVID; they were caught in the gap between their own limited resources and the expectations from communities and new audiences who were newly isolated. As pandemic restrictions eased by late 2022, arts service organizations, artists and cultural workers continued within the new hybrid paradigm of digital and on-the-ground work. All were attempting to meet expectations and needs of their members and mandates amid the realities of their own burnout, sector status quo in terms of funding and support with diminishing audience retention as people returned to other forms of social activity. This was profoundly felt in rural and northern communities.

Many small arts organizations and collectives were ineligible for emergency relief programs because, despite their consistent support of artists, they have adopted mixed-model operating structures in order to operate within the cultural sector. These may consist of alternative business models, or a functioning but adaptable (to circumstance) combination of project-based, unincorporated, without payroll or ad hoc structures. Additionally, small communities often have a mixed economy structure based on seasonal employment or short-term work.

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<sup>1</sup> For definitions, **see page (#)**

Current data practices fail to address the unique circumstances and impacts of small ASOs and collectives within both local and the broader (national and urban) arts sectors. The limitations on operating funding eligibility hamper the diversity and resilience of the arts ecosystem because it does not enable existing smaller organizations and collectives to address contemporary challenges, be recognized and supported for their effect on the communities they support or to have the capacity to adopt and streamline emerging technologies.

In rural, northern and remote communities across Canada, large organizational structures are rare outside of urban spaces. In urban spaces, large organizations are more common and have the ability to access strong, relevant, and contextual statistical and financial information to mobilize resources. Much of the available cultural data is relevant for larger, urban centres. Larger organizations tend to have more human resources available to help generate and disseminate data for their organizations and communities.

In comparison, rural and northern arts service organizations, like CI and other small ASOs, struggle to both find and generate adequate data to support their advocacy work on behalf of the artists, organizations, communities and municipalities they support who look to ASOs to provide relevant data that justifies municipal investments and demonstrate impact.

Historically, there has been limited data analysis relevant to the social and economic development impacts of collectives and small organizations in the arts, most notably of northern and rural communities. This data gap is tied to the privileging of research and data gathering by population base, organizational priorities, and the structure/requirements of data collection led by Canadian Arts Data / Données sur les arts au Canada (CADAC), Canadian Heritage (PCH), and other national and provincial arts service organizations. There is largely no statistical or other information that is collected regarding the activities of these collectives and small organizations. Only a small portion of data, if any, is prioritized.

Typically, it is larger and more established organizations across Canada that self-report on the Canadian Arts Data / Données sur les arts au Canada (CADAC) database (as required by some funders). The activities (financial and programming statistics) of small and ad hoc organizations are typically not collected. CADAC reporting is connected to operating funding; the eligibility requirements include incorporation and a relatively high annual organizational operating budget. Additionally, while statistical CADAC reporting by operating grant recipients is required by the Canada Council for the Arts, it is not required by all provincial arts funders<sup>2</sup>, and few small organizations are able to achieve the operational growth required to be eligible for operating funding.

In addition, while some data might be available through public access rights to CADAC and provincial funding data, the capacity of small organizations to access, analyze and disseminate relevant, coherent and impactful

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, within the four regions that participated in this research (Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario, Manitoba, and British Columbia), and of the groups receiving provincial operating funding, only the Ontario Arts Council requires statistical reporting to CADAC.

data is extremely limited. This work is increasingly important as more funders, municipalities and other groups expect quantifiable impact measures. Adding data analysis to the activities of a small organization is unrealistic given that small organizations in small rural and northern communities are at capacity for resources such as staffing and funding. This combination of factors leaves a significant gap in real and relevant data, which in turn diminishes organizational 'traction'.

A report by the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation (Fondation canadienne pour la revitalisation rural), *The State of Rural Canada III-Bridging Rural Data Gaps*, explains that data collection focus, and who is able to access the data, influences how rural regions are perceived by stakeholders, government agencies, the urban-oriented art sector and rural communities themselves. The book concludes with a number of recommendations, consistent with our own findings, including:

Show rural data in regional, provincial, territorial, and federal data. Standardized metrics that are collected consistently in a replicable manner are important. However, if we cannot see the rural story in these datasets, if it is obscured or dominated by urban areas, we cannot understand the needs, challenges, and opportunities that exist in rural places across Canada. This challenge requires the disaggregation of national, provincial, and territorial data to allow practitioners and scholars to see how important trends are reflected in rural and northern places. Where possible, these rural data sets should be publicly accessible and supported. (CRRF 49)

In addition to addressing the importance of data collection and advocating for both qualitative and quantitative data collection in rural regions, *Bridging Rural Data Gaps* also identifies other community-based and anecdotal forms of data collection from a variety of stakeholders, including those within the community, such as municipalities. Some of their recommendations include:

Ensure consistent, longitudinal qualitative and quantitative data are collected and used. No amount of quantitative assessment is sufficient to understand a whole problem or to develop an effective solution. This book highlights how non-statistical information is equally important for decision-making about rural places, as well as for planning and policy development. While qualitative data is often recognized as important, it is most often collected in single, one-off projects, making it challenging to track or compare over time. There are opportunities for the systematic collection of qualitative data to happen in different ways and at multiple levels. This includes everything from practitioners collecting anecdotes from local stakeholders to provincial, territorial, or federal-scale efforts to collect qualitative data related to quality of life or community resilience over time in a consistent manner. Both private and public funds are necessary to make these initiatives possible, as well as a heightened respect for qualitative research and data.

Support local efforts and capacity-building. Not all data needs to be collected or analyzed at a national, provincial, or territorial level—some data will be collected or analyzed locally for unique purposes. Support from upper levels of government is needed to help rural communities develop capacity, including human capacity to identify, access, and analyze existing sources of data, as well



as the capacity for communities to collect their own data. Resources, in the form of tools, technical assistance, and supports are critical, as are financial resources. (CRRF 8)

In order to address how difficult it is to access relevant arts sector data in Ontario, gather data that is specific to rural regions and leverage our resources through partnerships and collaborations, we worked with the Media Arts Network Ontario (MANO), a provincial ASO, during the spring of 2020. We conducted a series of open meetings (convened by MANO) and online regional meetings (led by CI) to support small groups and collectives. These included province-wide meetings with representatives from over 30 groups, meetings with community arts councils across Ontario and Northern Ontario-specific consultations. Key barriers that each group identified included feelings of isolation from peers, difficulty supporting administrative capacity and a lack of quantitative data to demonstrate impact. These conversations demonstrated the need for data collection, peer support and connection focused on the unique experiences and needs of these groups.

Given the national scope of the problem and its particular impacts within small and rural communities, we determined that continuing to engage in digital and networked community building, while incorporating shared administrative and data-gathering tools, would offer a strategic opportunity to advance the rural and northern arts sector in Canada.

## Definitions

For the purposes of this project, we used the following definitions for terms that are sometimes used interchangeably. Arts entities may define themselves within more than one category.

*Ad hoc group or collective:* As unincorporated entities with a range of governance and organizing structures, ad hoc groups or collectives may be discipline-specific or interdisciplinary. They may or may not have a membership structure; their mandate can be to provide support to a small, focused group of artists and/or they may support other groups, organizations and entities. Ad hoc groups may focus on artistic creation, and/or presenting, and/or art service and/or community organizing. They may have paid staff or be run entirely by volunteer power. Unincorporated ad hoc groups or collectives are ineligible for operating funding from all provincial and federal arts funders. They are also generally ineligible for funding from major funders such as the Ontario Trillium Foundation, Heritage Canada and municipalities that typically require formal incorporation for eligibility. They are eligible for project funding from the Canada Council for the Arts and provincial arts funders. Some ad hoc groups may 'professionalize' by incorporating, but others resist the boundaries and inherited structures of formal non-profits and choose, instead, to function within organizing and governance structures that are culturally, socially, artistically and administratively responsive.

*Ad hoc committee:* We learned through the research that many organizations rely on ad hoc committees to help deliver their programming; these committees are not independent organizations/groups with dedicated missions, but are project specific and last as long as the project does. Ad hoc committees are generally

powered by volunteers; in many cases, they expand the capacity of under-funded, and under-capacity, organizations.

*Non-profit arts organization:* Non-profit arts organizations are formally incorporated, either provincially or federally. They may, or may not, have charitable status. Non-profits are required to establish Boards of Directors, develop by-laws and follow a number of other regulations. Non-profit arts organizations have a wide range of missions, from supporting arts creation, to presenting, promotion, member services (such as training and educational opportunities) and/or arts service and advocacy. Many non-profits that have artistic creation or presenting missions may provide arts service functions; these include advocacy and/or policy development for municipalities, especially if Arts Service organizations do not exist in their regions, or when provincial or federal ASOs are not representing their needs. Paid staffing does not necessarily follow formal incorporation, although non-profit arts organizations (of requisite operating size) are eligible for operating funding from provincial and federal arts funders.

*Arts service organization (ASO):* ASOs serve either a particular discipline, community or broader interdisciplinary arts sector at local, regional, provincial or federal levels. Similar to professional associations, they are formed to support networks of artists and/or organizations, with the aim of increasing the capacity and presence of their sector. Their activities include professional development, advocacy, networking, community organizing, financial, legal and administrative support and the promotion and representation of their members/communities/sectors to government, funders and the broader community. ASOs include local and regional (non government) arts councils. The ASO is both a pillar of the art sector ecosystem and an intermediary between the artist and the various components of the arts sector, government and community. An ASO often has a defined organizational structure — such as a Board of Directors — and incorporated for-profit or non-profit status — but can also be informally organized, or function as a network. In many cases, arts organizations with a mandate to support arts creation provide arts service when there are no existing ASOs or inadequate ASO representation. ASOs operate with paid staff, a combination of paid and unpaid staff or volunteers.

## **The Research Framework**

CI's previous work and consultations with the Media Arts Network in Ontario (MANO) regarding ad hoc groups, collectives and ASOs in small communities in Northeastern Ontario informed our interest in examining the possibilities of digital strategy adoption to support the arts sector in rural and northern regions. We therefore applied to the Canada Council for the Digital Strategies Fund..

The first stage of the project was to conduct cross-regional consultations with arts sector groups and organizations that mainly support the arts sector within rural and northern regions. These consultations, and subsequent statistical research, would assist in identifying online tools and digital strategies that could offer

increased organizational capacity, such as professional development tools, shared administrative services, and data collection. These types of digital strategies would boost the capacity of small, project-based, collective and/or unincorporated arts groups that are currently underserved and underrepresented within existing services.

We worked with a team of four arts administrators, or regional coordinators, from each region to focus on the arts service groups that support visual, media, performing, and interdisciplinary arts sectors. The regional coordinators collaborated as researchers and consultants, disseminated our research tools (survey) to arts service organizations, ad hoc groups, their networks and/or their membership in each region and offered their experience and knowledge regarding sector knowledge and concerns.

## Project Participants

### *Leadership*

*Jaymie Lathem, Project Manager:* Jaymie Lathem of North Bay, Ontario is the out-going Executive Director of Creative Industries North Bay Inc., a regional art service organization that supports, connects, and promotes the creative sector in North Bay and Nipissing to foster a progressive and prosperous community. Jaymie is a practicing visual artist with a focus in contemporary drawing and has exhibited work throughout Ontario. Over the past decade, Jaymie has worked in various community-based and creative sector organizations across the northeast. In her role at CI, she sat as Chair of the Public Art Advisory Committee, led the development of a public art framework and annual funding for the City of North Bay and developed a micro-granting program for the local creative sector, which launched in 2023 and forged a partnership with the North Bay and Area Community Foundation to build long-term sustainable funding to maintain and grow the grant program. Jaymie is currently the new General Manager of We Live Up Here, an arts organization based in Sudbury, Ontario where she will continue to focus on building new pathways for community-based creative sector sustainability in smaller, rural and Northern cities.

*Chris Turnbull, Researcher, Co-Writer:* Chris is a freelance writer, editor, and researcher living in Eastern Ontario. She has worked in higher education to develop, coordinate, and collaborate on hybrid distance education and training programs. In this role, she adapted programming to address technological limits and possibilities and developed peer mentoring and student support methodologies for community based and online learning.

*Sophie Edwards, Researcher, Co-Writer (she/her/ settler):* Sophie is a writer, researcher and arts consultant based on Mnidoo Mnising/Manitoulin Island in Northeastern Ontario. With 35 years experience in the cultural and community development sectors, Sophie has provided leadership for numerous research, capacity building, networking, training and advocacy projects with local, regional, provincial and national organizations. As the founding artistic and executive director of 4elements Living Arts (2002–2017), she designed and

facilitated dozens of community engaged arts and creative research projects. For a period, she was the Northeastern Ontario Representative for the Ontario Arts Council, supporting organizations and artists throughout the region.

*Adam McKay, Data Analyst:* Adam McKay is a Canadian geographer based out of North Bay, Ontario. He has a Master of Science (MSc) from Clemson University and a Master of Spatial Analytics (MSA) from Toronto Metropolitan University. He has over a decade of experience working with GIS, complex data and related technologies ranging in topics from education in First Nation communities to geodatabase and ArcGIS administration for the Ontario Ministry of Health to big data analysis at the World Health Organization.

## *British Columbia*

### **Regional Coordinator**

*Carla Stephenson: Founder & Director of the [Rural Arts Inclusion Lab \(RAIL\)](#)*

The Rural Arts Inclusion Lab (RAIL) is a project created to address the systems that exclude marginalized voices from arts organizations, audiences and performers in rural British Columbia. This three-year place-based project is supported by a systems change grant from the Vancouver Foundation. RAIL operates on the unceded and stolen land of the Sinixt that is colonially called the Kootenays.

RAIL's Social Innovation Lab fosters inclusivity, generates opportunities for shared perspectives and approaches and aims to transform our social system (culture, laws, policy etc.) through shared sense-making, recognizing new social patterns (innovations, principles, ideas) and engaging with, and building relations for, effective change. A Social Innovation Lab enables ongoing, process-oriented and combinatorial systems change. It impacts society at the broadest levels.

Organization: They have a non-membership structure in order to have maximum flexibility on behalf of rural arts organizations. Their focus is on systems change and advocacy in rural communities; RAIL works collaboratively with urban and rural organizations and foundations to open opportunities to artists and organizations working within the margins and edges of the arts sector.

Initiatives: Social Innovation Lab; digital innovation and sharing; synchronous learning equity workshops (350 organizations in the lower Mainland and Interior); festival organizer (Tiny Lights, Ymir); volunteer mobilization using shared services model; exhibiting and artistic platforms for underserved populations (Indigenous, BPOC, LGBTQIA2+, Disabled, Rural).

## British Columbia Consulting Circle

*Elliot Hearte: Executive Director of [Arts BC](#)*

Arts BC is a provincial ASO that focuses on [systems change](#), [digital literacy](#), anti-oppressive change, and sector recovery. It has over 430 members in 140+ communities in BC. Arts BC aims to be a key resource for the arts and culture sector, serve as a hub for community connections and support the development of creative partnerships and collaborations.

*Jenny Farkas: Project Coordinator for [Creative Coast](#)*

Creative Coast is a collaboration of artists and arts organizations on Vancouver Island that is actively forging cross-sector connections and synergies (such as economic development and tourism). It is located within the traditional territories of the Coast Salish, Kwakwaka'wakw and Nuuchahnulth Peoples, Creative Coast is a resource hub for artists and arts administrators who seek connection with other artists/organizations, coordinated programming, shared services and collaboration projects or involvement in strategic planning at the super-regional level.

*Maggie Shirley: Former Curator at [Kootenay Gallery of Art](#)*

Maggie Shirley has been a curator for 8 years, and is currently doing grant writing and digital strategies work with the Kootenay Arts Council.

*Elyssa Sasaki: Executive Director of [Island Mountain Arts](#)*

Island Mountain Arts is an artist-run centre in Lhtako Dené unceded territory (Wells, BC). Island Mountain Arts offers residencies and arts programming, such as Art + The Forest nature camps and forest workshops, mentoring and funding resources, workshops, showcases/exhibits and a speaker/panelist series.

## Manitoba

### Regional Coordinator

*Rose-Anne Harder: Executive Director of the [Manitoba Arts Network](#) (MAN)*

Manitoba Arts Network is a member-driven not-for-profit provincial arts service organization for performing and visual arts organizations in rural Manitoba that connects 7 regions and serves over 50 arts and cultural organizational members as well as over 60 individual artist members throughout the province. They coordinate tours in 17 rural and northern Indigenous communities. MAN supports and strengthens arts organizations by fostering a collaborative arts marketplace and ecosystem that is vibrant, sustainable and resilient. Manitoba Arts Network and our members live and work on Treaty 1, 2, 3, and 5 territories. They acknowledge and appreciate the contributions of the past, present, and future generations of the Anishinaabe

(Ojibway), Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, Dene peoples, Métis Nation, and Inuit. MAN is committed to developing a stronger relationship toward increased representation of Indigenous peoples in the arts.

## **Manitoba Consulting Circle**

*Sara Brereton: Program Coordinator for [Manitoba Arts Network](#) (MAN)*

Responsible for coordinating MAN's Concerts in Care program, in partnership with Health Arts Society. Her role is to help with research projects, mentorships, marketing, facilitating membership, research and data and our annual conference MB Showcase.

*Christa Milne: Administrator/ED of [Arts Mosaic](#)*

Arts Mosaic is located in Borden, Manitoba and works with the Town of Borden and four surrounding municipalities. Operating for over 40 years, Arts Mosaic has a vision to make the arts, in any discipline, accessible to each and every person in the community. Arts Mosaic operates an art gallery, conducts workshops, presents theatrical and musical productions held in local heritage museums, operates the Costume Closet (4300 sq ft) and manages an artisans marketplace. It operates within Treaty 2 territory.

*Stephanie McKinn: Executive Director of [Prairie Fusion Arts and Entertainment](#)*

Prairie Fusion Arts and Entertainment is a non-profit visual and performing arts, presenter, and programmer located in Portage la Prairie. It operates within Treaty 1 territory.

## **Northwestern Ontario**

### **Regional Coordinator**

*Jaymie Lathem: Out-going Executive Director at [Creative Industries Inc.](#) (CI) & General Manager of [We Live Up Here Urban Arts](#) and [Up Here Festival](#)*

Creative Industries Inc. is an inclusive, regional art service organization that advocates, promotes and supports a thriving and sustainable creative sector in North Bay, Nipissing. North Bay, Nipissing is situated in traditional Nibisiing Anishinabek territory on lands occupied by the peoples of Nipissing and Dokis First Nations whose treaty rights are within the lands recognized and protected by the Robinson Huron Treaty of 1850.

We Live Up Here is a not-for-profit corporation, originally formed as a collective in 2012 with the purpose of celebrating and mobilizing Sudbury's urban culture. The project started as a collaborative photography book that was a resounding success, awakening civic pride. Launching in 2015, Up Here is an independent urban art and emerging music festival that takes place each summer in weird, wonderful Sudbury. We Live Up Here and Up Here are based out of the traditional lands of the Atikameksheng Anishnawbek, and that Sudbury also

includes the traditional lands of the Wahnapiatae First Nation. We pay tribute to all First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples who we see as caretakers of this land's past, present and future.

## **Northeastern Ontario Consulting Circle**

*Alex Rondeau: Co-Director of Near North Mobile Media Lab (N2M2L) | 1/2 of ad hoc collective Minor Hockey Curatorial | Curator at Between Pheasants Contemporary (BPC)*

Alexander Rondeau is a queer curator, writer, and artist from rural Northeastern Ontario. In recent years, he has served as the Executive Co-Director of the Near North Mobile Media Lab (North Bay, ON) and Curatorial Assistant at Union Gallery (Kingston, ON) all the while running an experimental presentation space in the pheasant coop on his family farm called Between Pheasants Contemporary. Rondeau is also one half of Minor Hockey Curatorial. He is currently working towards his PhD in Cultural Studies from Queen's University, and holds an MFA in Criticism & Curatorial Practice from OCAD University, and a BFA in Photography Studies from Toronto Metropolitan University.

Near North Mobile Media Lab (N2M2L) is a North Bay Ontario based media arts artist-run centre that provides the tools that media artists, students, filmmakers, and audiences in Northern Ontario need to produce, present, and enjoy contemporary media arts in all its forms. This includes - but is not limited to - media installations, filmmaking, video art, animation, documentary arts, and sound production. N2M2L provides rental services of industry-standard equipment at low prices, runs workshops, holds screenings and events to foster a growing community of media artists in our region. N2M2L also runs the Digital Creator North program, which is a free, low-barrier digital and media arts program for youth and emerging artists.

Between Pheasants Contemporary (BPC) is particularly dedicated to championing the practices of emerging artists, curators, writers, thinkers, and makers and the development of contemporary art in rural Northern Ontario. Accordingly, BPC prioritizes exhibitions by practitioners that are underrepresented in the region including BIPOC and LGBTQ2S+ folks. The gallery, situated on the left side of a fully operational pheasant // chicken duplex coop, can present exhibitions year-round. Between Pheasants Contemporary operates on Windjammer Ranch in Kerns Township — a rural agricultural community outside of New Liskeard in Northeastern so-called “Ontario”. BPC is located within Robinson-Huron treaty land: past, present, and future home of Cree, Ojibway, and Algonquin. BPC is committed to upholding values that disrupt colonial heteronormative power structures and is dedicated to programming that challenges dominant relations between land and peoples in the North and programming that is thoughtful, innovative, and accountable to the myriad communities around BPC.

*Miranda Bouchard: Artistic Director of Thinking Rock Community Arts*

A team of artists, cultural workers and community members of Indigenous, Newcomer and settler descent who co-create spaces for dialogue, mutual understanding and artful social change through multidisciplinary, multi-generational, cross-cultural community arts projects, created with and for the people living along the



North Shore of Lake Huron, from Baawaating (Sault Ste. Marie) to Genaabaajing (Serpent River First Nation) and all points in between. Based in Thessalon, they work across the territories of the Anishinaabek Peoples of Baawaating, Thessalon First Nation, Misswezahging and Genaabaajing – lands covered by the Robinson Huron Treaty of 1850, where the Métis have lived for generations, and which is now home to folx of many diverse Indigenous nations.

*Clayton Windatt: Executive Director of the [Artist-Run Centres and Collectives Conference](#)*

Clayton Windatt is a curator, multi-arts performer and filmmaker living and working in Ontario. He holds an extensive history working in Artist-Run Culture and Community Arts. As the former Executive Director of the White Water Gallery, [Indigenous Curatorial Collective](#) (2015-2018).

The Artist-Run Centres and Collectives Conference is a Canadian organization that represents – by way of the nine artist-run centres’ associations that form its membership – over 180 artist-run centres in the visual and media arts, contemporary craft and architecture and collectives in cities and towns across the country. ARCA supports their members in navigating bureaucracy and funding programs, and advocates for the wider artist-run sector at the national level. The Indigenous Curatorial Collective is an Indigenous-run and led non-profit organization that aims to support and connect fellow Indigenous curators, artists, writers, academics and professionals through various methods of gathering. The ICCA engages in critical discourses, increases professional opportunities for our members, develops programming and, most importantly, works to build reciprocal relationships with Indigenous curators, artists, communities and institutions.

*[Sophie Edwards](#): Writer, researcher and arts consultant*

Sophie has 35 years of experience working in the arts and community engagement/development. She co-founded and acted as the founding AD/ED of 4elements Living Arts (2002-2017) and, for a period, was the Northeastern Representative of the Ontario Arts Council. She has worked with numerous organizations at local, regional, provincial and national scales.

## *Newfoundland and Labrador*

### **Regional Coordinator**

*Amy Henderson: Executive Director of [Business and Arts Newfoundland and Labrador](#)*

Business and Arts NL is a non-profit that serves artists, businesses and communities on the island of Ktaqmkuk (Newfoundland) and Labrador and operates between the functions of an economic development office and an arts organization. It fosters alliances between the arts and community in the private, public, and social sectors, fosters a community that encourages creativity and innovation through collaboration with the arts, communicates the benefits of art/community collaborations and facilitates access to alternative sources of financial, human, and community capital for the arts. It currently runs 7 active programs and has a roster of



150 community, arts and individual supporters. Current programs include Business Workshops for Artists, Business Volunteers for the Arts, a Public Art App, a Grow to Lead Mentorship Program, and Brokering and Collaboration services. It enables capacity building in the arts community by improving business skills for artists and arts organizations through actively communicating with, and connecting, the business and arts communities. It advocates on behalf of the arts.

## **Newfoundland and Labrador Consulting Circle**

*Christine Henebury: Founder and Chair of the [Association for the Arts in Mount Pearl](#) (AAMP)*

Christine is also the training liaison and active Vice President for the Storytellers of Canada-Conteurs du Canada. AAMP's Mandate is to provide accessible arts opportunities to citizens and to provide connections between audiences and artists.

*Jenn Winsor: Executive Director of [Writers NL](#)*

Writers NL is an arts service organization that supports writers at all stages of their careers. It provides mentorships, MS evaluations, readings and awards to try to support all the writers in Newfoundland and Labrador.

*Rhonda Tulk-Lane: CEO of [Music NL](#)*

Music Newfoundland and Labrador's mission is to lead Newfoundland and Labrador's music community and industry through advocacy, connections, education, programs and services and partnerships. It is the second largest arts organization in Canada and has 847 members. It provides funding for musicians and the music sector, runs an instrumental connections program and offers various types of other support and benefits (insurance, group RRSP).

# Methodology & Process

In order to gather a clearer understanding of the status of arts service organizations and ad hoc/community groups operating in rural and northern regions in Canada, as well as to try to define how they function within the art sector (national, provincial, regional and community), we contacted the Executive Directors of ASOs that primarily work with or support rural and northern communities. We took a regional approach to keep the scale of our project reasonable, given timelines, but also to understand variations in rural and Northern communities across Canada.

- BC (West) — Rural Arts Inclusion Lab (RAIL)
- Manitoba (Prairies) — Manitoba Arts Network (MAN)
- Ontario (East) — Creative Industries (CI)
- Newfoundland (Atlantic) — Business and Arts NFLD

## *Project Phases & Steps*

1. We reached out to an ASO in each region regarding the project and invited each to participate as a Regional Coordinator. We looked for ASOs that work primarily with northern and rural regions and who could collectively represent a range of disciplines, advocacy, and networks. Each organization's Executive Director assisted with sector knowledge in each representative region. The Regional Coordinators functioned as an executive group and offered us advice and perspectives. They provided context regarding the arts sector in their respective region; identified networks and collaborative practices; assisted with, and reviewed, our survey and its development; and were the main point of contact for sending the survey to their memberships, ad hoc organizations, and other relevant groups in rural, northern and remote communities.
2. We organized an initial group meeting with all of the Regional Coordinators to discuss our project and their role, as well as present our methods and research questions. We learned about their experiences within their regions and sectors. We created an MOU, an invoicing system to pay Regional Coordinators for their time and a folder system on Google Drive to share materials and information. The Regional Coordinators also met with us prior to our survey development to assist with questions that could identify regional concerns.
3. We worked with Adam McKay, a data specialist based in Northern Ontario, to design the survey and enable the generation and analysis of data from key areas, such as: the status and capacity of ASOs and other groups operating in the four regions; any existing digital and non-digital strategies and collaborations; and innovations and considerations of needed sector supports. It is important to establish the status and capacity of organizations because less is known about smaller organizations. It is important to determine how these organizations adopt or explore new digital strategies.
4. We created a Google Forms survey for the project and sent it to the Regional Coordinators for feedback. When it was completed, the Regional Coordinators distributed the survey to key

organizations within each of their regions. They identified groups and organizations that primarily (although sometimes not exclusively) operate in rural, northern and remote regions and provide arts services as formal or informal ASOs. The groups and organizations may: work to support, or are led by, underserved populations within the arts sector (Indigenous, BPOC, LGBTQIA2+, Disabled); have been operating for differing times, from ad hoc, emerging and established groups with differing funding and organizational structures; function as groups working within or across different arts disciplines; operate virtually and/or non-digitally; and/or provide forms of support and reciprocity between organizations and other sectors.

5. After the survey was completed, we asked the Regional Coordinators to invite three to five organizations from their regional survey respondent groups (Manitoba, British Columbia, Ontario, and Newfoundland and Labrador) to have a conversation as a focus group, one for each region. These conversations provided quantitative data, contexts and insight regarding the art sector in each region. The organizations were chosen for their specific and nuanced knowledge of their regions, as well as for their interpretations regarding trends or gaps that we noticed from the regional survey results. These included organizational structures, staffing, arts support, community outlooks, funding, digital and non-digital support to artists and organizations, and various creative sector reciprocities. The Regional Coordinators also met with us after the focus-group conversations to discuss the survey results, impact and to share their ideas about possible collaborations and plans for digital sharing and collaboration. Their working knowledge of their region and its arts sector was critical to this study.
6. Each participant (Regional Coordinators and Circle conversants) was paid for their time.
7. Survey data was analyzed.
8. In addition to our primary research, we conducted an extensive search for data relevant to northern and rural arts sectors which included national, provincial and regional research projects, status reports and other resources. We aimed to learn from existing projects and research and, if possible, use them as guides to underpin future ideas and initiatives. These resources are listed in the resource section at the end of this report.
9. We held a final conversation with the Regional Coordinators to discuss the survey and findings as a group, consider next steps and collaborations and develop forms of data sharing, including ethics. We discussed the difficulties in obtaining, or accessing, relevant community-level data for rural and northern communities, and our observations that such data mainly reflects urban-oriented perspectives and policies. It was decided by the team that the data for this project would be available collectively for several reasons: to counter 'data hoarding' trends, provide tools for the various regions for subsequent projects, for advocacy work and to develop a profile. We also decided to delete all meeting recordings to ensure confidentiality and to maintain a safe space for discussion. The identities of survey respondents and conversation participants are not identified in this report.
10. The draft report was shared with each region for feedback.

## Existing Research

There have been a number of research projects that aimed to assess the impact, capacity and needs of the cultural sector. For instance, research by [Mass Culture](#) has included the identification and mapping of arts service organizations across Canada – which has helped to address a lack of knowledge about the status of ASOs across Canada and the advantages and impacts of their focused work. This broad perspective on the status of ASOs across Canada is important for its overview of the organizational structures that exist for art organizations; the inclusion of a range of art sector organizations in Mass Culture’s research is evidence that the creative sector is a powerful generator of economic and social development in Canada. Our focus contributes to this national 'revealing' of arts sector organizations by focusing on rural and northern contexts and the groups and organizations working from within these areas of the country. Our research considers how digital strategies that are currently being used or are being adopted as resources, can address some of the gaps affecting the operational stability of art sector organizations or groups, as well as provide tools for continued support of artists. Digital strategies for rural, northern and remote organizations include the realities of coverage – some strategies may be possible for some communities and not for others. Over time, however, digital strategies and innovations will become more accessible – and current conversations and exposures offer a shared resource and forms of piloting that other communities can make use of later. A list of existing research and resources is available in this report’s resource section.

## *Survey Detail & Methodology*

We developed questions that generate information about the type and structure of the ASO or organization; human resource stability (staffing, paid and unpaid; volunteers and interns); existing activities; funding status; supports identified as useful or lacking; and demographic information. Digital infrastructure was a particular focus of our survey; we were interested to understand what digital infrastructures (literacy, access, organizational adoption and data acquisition) were in place or were needed. We were also interested to understand if digital infrastructure would assist in information and task sharing between organizations, such as programs that would assist with building operational capacity (for instance, human resource sharing and accounting). Some of our questions related to the organizational culture of the ASO, such as whether its framework is equitable and represents all communities, with a focus on underserved communities (Indigenous, BPOC, LGBTQIA2+, Disabled) in leadership and artist support. Additionally, our survey tried to assess the level of engagement in mentoring and training, nesting or organizational sharing of resources and other forms of inter-arts organizational support.

We received fifty responses; of those, we removed seven because of duplication within organizations (e.g. they filled out more than one survey); in one case, the organization was not an arts organization, nor did it provide arts services or work directly with arts organizations. Once these were removed, our total number of completed surveys was forty-three. The sample size reflects many conditions: organizations may have received the survey but did not complete it due to capacity issues such as time, staffing, research/survey 'fatigue', suspicion or concern regarding possible repercussions for sharing potentially negative information

and how the research would be used and stasis at the organizational level. The responses we did receive, in addition to the regional conversations, offered invaluable context and additional information regarding the functioning of arts service organizations and ad hoc collectives across Canada. We do not see this research as representative of all organizations or regions across Canada, but it does provide relevant and meaningful context, considerations, and directions for the networks in the regions we worked with. In addition, it presents data directly related to the art sector in rural and northern communities. The survey data and information from the conversations are used in this report.

The majority of the survey respondents are non-profit organizations. Just over half of respondents are community-based arts organizations, and another third belong to a regional or provincial ASO. We excluded Nunavut and the Northwest Territories despite the fact that, proportionately and culturally, they are important regions regarding rural and northern organizations and creators/artists in Canada. The Northwest Territories and Nunavut should be included in in-depth future research, with organization occurring from within the territories. Project leadership and community agency, along with substantial funding would enable a greater depth of focus and relevance. The relation between remote and rural regions of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut and other circumpolar regions and communities is also important in this context.

### *Survey & Data Development*

The survey was developed using Google Forms, a free survey administration tool offered by Google. Google Forms is easy to use and integrates seamlessly with the rest of the Google suite of web-based tools. The tool allows for some basic response validation and simple skip logic, which was sufficient for the ASO survey. Additionally, Google Forms provides a built-in analytics feature, which allows survey editors to better understand their data immediately.

The survey contained 18 sections and 45 questions of various types (e.g., multiple choice, select many, short answer, and more). In total, there were 50 responses collected over the course of 45 days. Seven responses were removed because the organization had duplicate responses, was not rural, or was not an arts organization. This left 43 valid responses.

Google Forms allows for a download of a comma-separated-values (i.e., csv) file containing all the data. Two main cleaning processes were applied to the data before analysis could be conducted. First, the header row of the csv contains the full text of the questions. Since some questions were rather lengthy, it made the csv difficult to use unless the header row was re-coded to a more friendly format. The re-coding of the headers was done using Python 3.9 and Pandas 1.5 in Jupyter Notebooks. Secondly, many of the survey questions allowed respondents to make multiple selections. By default, Google Forms concatenates all user responses (i.e., values) to multiple section questions into a single column and separates the values by a semi-colon (;). To make these questions easier to analyze, a Boolean column was created for each possible response to the multiple selection questions and populated accordingly. This resulted in a very rich dataset containing 333

columns. This disaggregation process was also completed using Python 3.9 and pandas 1.5 in Jupyter Notebooks. All subsequent analysis was conducted using a combination of Excel Workbooks and pandas 1.5.

The survey provided a rich set of data, beyond what we have included in this report, which will be useful for the regional partners in their efforts to access relevant community and regional-level statistics.

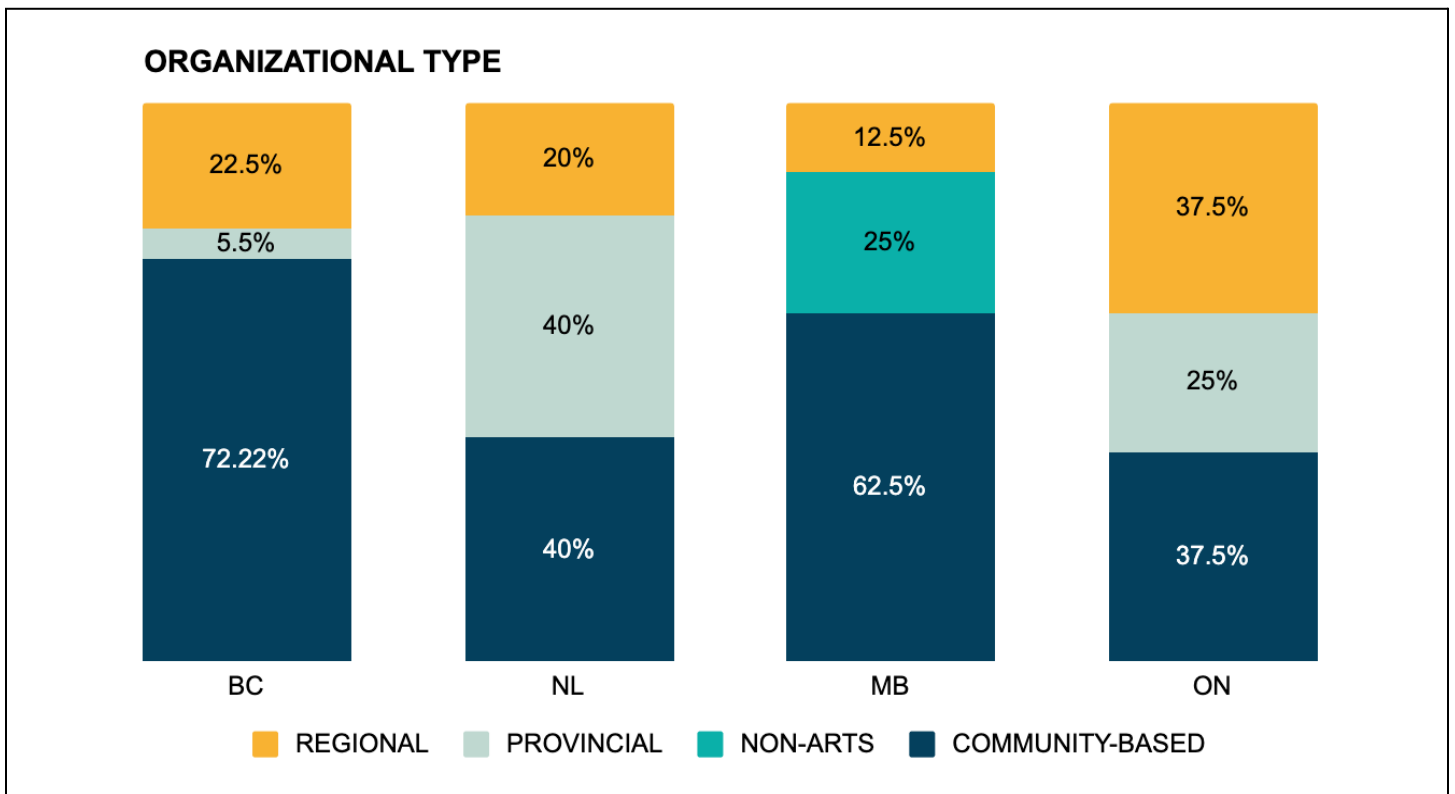
## Survey Demographics

50 surveys, 43 valid

- ▷ British Columbia (BC): 18
- ▷ Northeastern Ontario (ON): 7
- ▷ Manitoba (MB): 9
- ▷ Newfoundland and Labrador (NL): 9

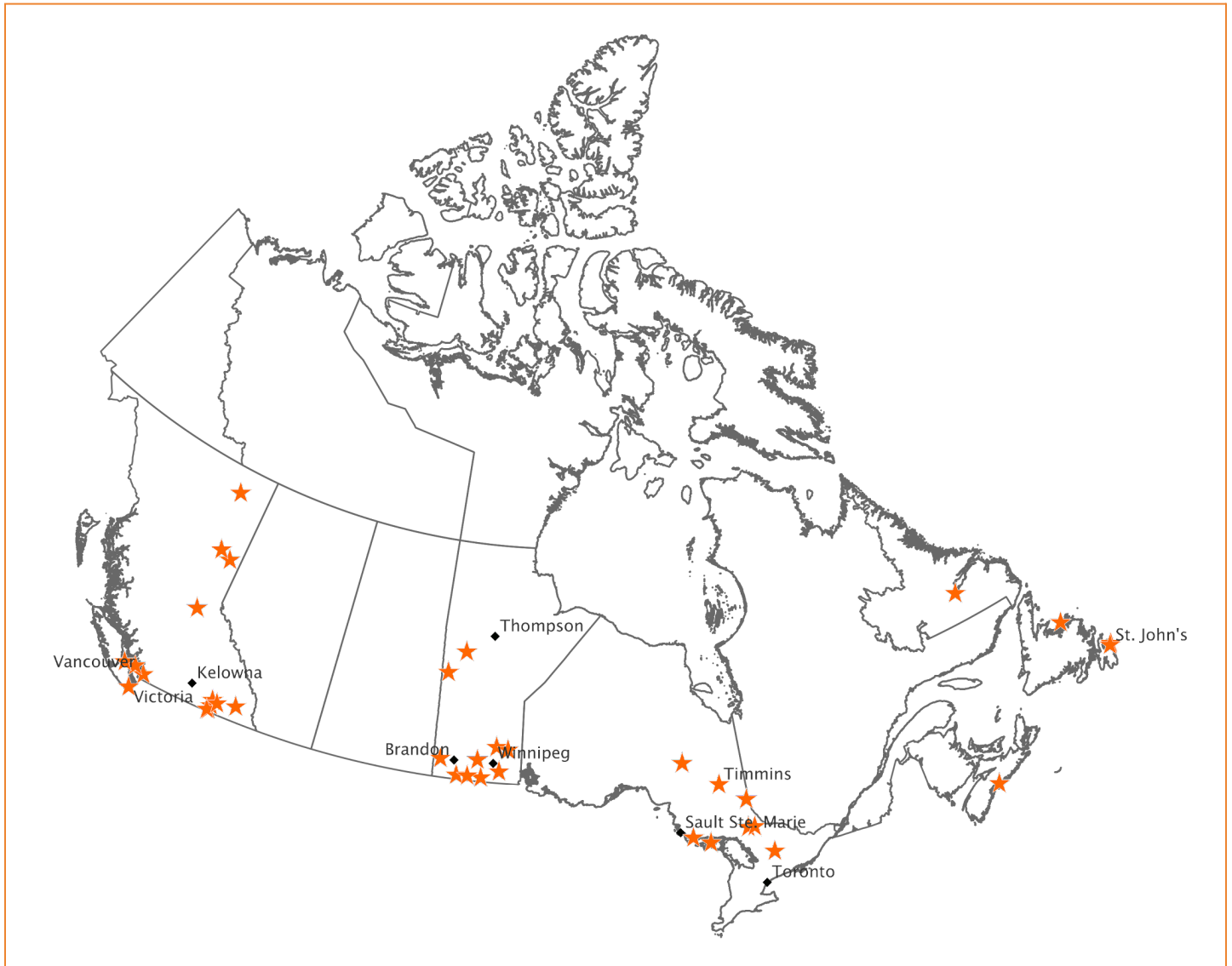
### Type of Organization

- ▷ Community based organizations: BC (72.2%); NL (40%); ON (40%); MB (62.5%)
- ▷ Non-arts organizations: BC (0); NL (0); MB (25%); ON (0)
- ▷ Provincial ASO's: BC (5.5%); NL (40%); MB (0); ON (25%)
- ▷ Regional Arts Organizations: BC (22.2%); NL (20%); MB (12.5%); ON (37.5%)



## Map of Regional Respondents

- ▷ We generated a map based on the 43 respondents to our survey. It focuses on rural/northern/remote/small city ASOs, arts councils, and community organizations within the four regions of our research.



## Findings: Cross Canada Contexts

Our report identifies national and regional strategies or recommendations regarding the arts sector in rural/remote regions in Canada. While each region has varying inter-regional demographics and intra-regional networks, we found that there are a number of similar issues that affect all four regions.

Components that deeply affect the functioning of arts services organizations, ad hoc collectives, community groups, and their relations with other sectors include:

- ▷ *Capacity*: recommendations focus on addressing gaps and inconsistencies, staffing, the importance of funding human resources and capacity building resources;
- ▷ *Sector funding & community investment*: municipal, provincial, federal, other cultural sector investors/stakeholders and the role of arts organizations in rural and northern communities’
- ▷ *Digital & data strategies*: access, shared digital strategies, funding for strategy as innovation, and funding to maintain strategies;
- ▷ *Structural considerations*: recognition and support of ASOs and ad hoc collectives/groups;
- ▷ *Advocacy*: the value of creative sector storytelling (qualitative and quantitative, data access and ownership, community expectations and fostering relationships with Indigenous, BPOC, LGBTQ+, and disabled communities

While broader systemic issues are beyond the scope of this research project and weren’t the focus of our research, our interest in digital strategies was motivated by the possibility that they could build more capacity for organizations. Further, the deepening issues of precarity and lack of adequate funding for organizations in rural and northern communities point to the challenges of developing, managing and maintaining any type of strategies, digital or otherwise. It is ironic that for arts organizations to be able to build more capacity, they will need more capacity, such as the ability to increase and equitably sustain skilled people within the sector.

### Capacity

For rural and northern arts organizations across Canada, capacity — the ability to support and advocate for artists, the ability to work within those rural and northern communities to promote creative, equitable work at the local, regional, provincial, or national levels, the ability to be financially viable and the ability to contribute to and foster a vibrant and diverse community — is a constant struggle.

The majority of survey respondents noted that they are under capacity at the organizational level and burned out professionally. In one region<sup>3</sup>, it was noted that funding models haven’t changed for several decades; in

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout the report, we have elected to not identify specific conversants, organizations or communities to protect relationships between individuals and organizations and organizations and funders.



another, that the arts sector was continually being reduced by the current provincial government. In another, there was some focus on cross-sectoral relationships to expand networks, collaboration, representation and access. Another organization noted that it acts more like an economic development organization because it leverages skill trading between creatives and the business sector and, in the process, raises awareness of existing capacity gaps and how to potentially fill them. The organizations are constantly finding creative ways to address rural sector scarcities and are weighted by social, environmental, economic, and other expectations that other sectors do not have to address when the organizations within them are fulfilling their mandates.

## **Paid & Volunteer Staffing**

In rural, northern and remote communities, funded staff is essential for small arts organizations. One reason for this is that the creative sector is integrated into multiple components of community life without the support that benefits urban organizations, including population size, access to more resources (funding, physical), a wider range of exhibition and presentation spaces and the recognition from within communities of the creative sector as distinctive from other activities (sports, education, recreation). In a small community, the municipality might contact an arts administrator and ask for an event or workshop without providing consistent funding support. Yet, an arts organization needs staffing to: apply for grants, answer questions, organize events, hire summer students, collaborate with other cross-sector organizations, field requests, write reports, present information to community and Council, attend meetings of other sectors and organize and collect data (digital administration). Staffing increases capacity. Funded positions enable the continuity of the organization. Hired staff, in turn, invest in the organization and the community.

Consistent data regarding employment and human resources in arts sector organizations within rural, northern and remote regions in Canada is lacking, but some inferences can be made from national reporting on arts sector gaps: if urban organizations are struggling, then rural organizations will also be struggling (with a longer recovery projection). There are risks that the organization disappears<sup>4</sup>.

For example, Hill Strategies' report "Organizational Stress and Resilience in the Arts", published in 2021, offers an analysis of the impact Covid had on the arts sector during 2019-2020. The report notes that arts organizations were challenged to continue. The article referenced a National Arts and Culture Impact Study<sup>5</sup> published in late 2020 that reported that 79% of arts organizations indicated high or very high levels of stress

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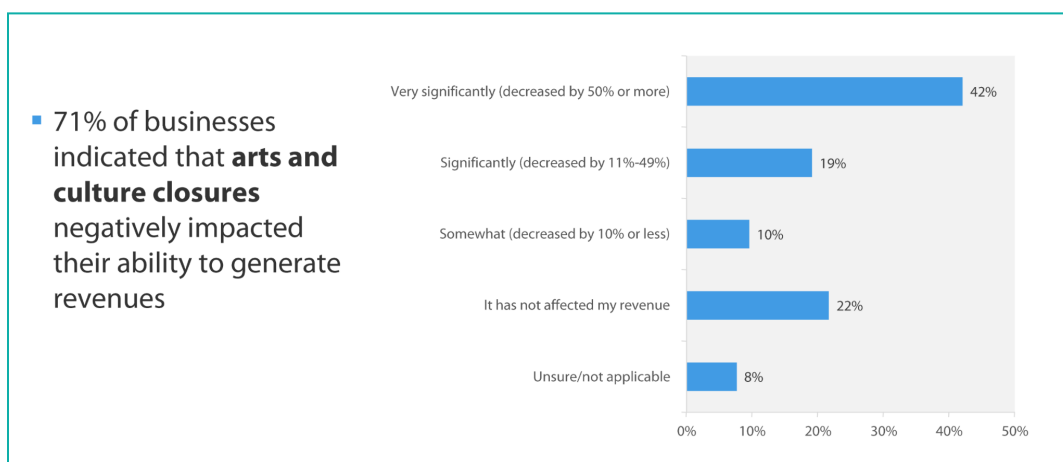
<sup>4</sup> There was anecdotal evidence from our conversations with regional cultural workers that organizations, projects and festivals had gone 'quiet', were struggling or had closed. One person noted that their own organization had been increasingly supporting struggling organizations. This, in turn, stretched their own capacity and increased stress on their own ability to function.

<sup>5</sup> PRA Inc., National Arts and Culture Impact Survey: Organizations Report, January 2021, <https://oc.ca/en/national-arts-and-culture-impact-survey/>.

and anxiety (compared to 25% pre-pandemic). In addition, organizations in the arts sector were challenged by government regulations with respect to public health orders. The uncertainty of government actions affected planning, contributed to staff stress and burnout and fostered financial constraints. As a result, there were fluctuations in demand for arts services and a shortage of physical resources such as equipment and access to space (Hill Strategies 5-6). Overall, there was a lack of capacity to adapt to the social cost of CV. Staff stress affected employee health, employee retention, human resource capacity and organizational stability. The report also notes:

At the same time, many arts organizations are facing challenges in hiring staff as they re-open. In the arts, entertainment, and recreation, the vacancy rate for payroll employees was 8.4% in the second quarter of 2021, more than double the rate in the first quarter (3.7%). The 8.4% vacancy rate is the highest since comparable records started in 2015. (Hill Strategies 6)

Given that national data is influenced by urban responses more predominantly than rural and northern, it is logical to assume that organizations in rural and northern regions experienced additional stresses on organizational capacity – including staffing and funding. In 2021, Digital Innovation Group commissioned *Impact Assessment of Arts and Culture: Vancouver Islands and Gulf Islands Super Region*, a comprehensive economic and non-economic assessment of the local arts and culture sector in Vancouver Island and the Gulf Island’s Super Region. One finding is the negative effect on the business sector when art and culture organizations close.



Source: Impact Assessment of the Arts and Culture Sector: Vancouver Island and Gulf Islands Super Region Presentation, Nordicity 2021.

Organizations have a variety of staffing combinations: paid staff, or paid and volunteer staff or only volunteer staff. Notably, paid and full-time staff are often funded through short-term funding programs and internships. Funding is variable. The charts below describe how staffing and funding are connected; non-profit and ad hoc arts organizations rely on funding to assist with capacity.

Staff Table 1

- ▷ 30 (78.9%) organizations do not have funding for a FT paid internship or trainee position
  - ▶ 15 of those organizations also have 0 FT paid staff (non-internship)
- ▷ 24 (63.1%) organizations have either 1 FT paid staff (non-internship) or 0 FT paid staff (non-internship)
- ▷ 29 (76.3%) organizations are operating with 2 or fewer FT paid staff (non-internship)

**Staff Table 1:** Count of organizations by full-time paid staff and number of funded full-time positions for training and internship

Number of FT paid staff	Zero (0) FT funded	1 FT funded	2 FT funded	3-5 FT funded	6-9 FT funded	10+ FT funded	Total
0	15	0	0	0	0	0	15
1	6	3	0	0	0	0	9
2	4	0	1	0	0	0	5
3-5	3	1	0	0	1	0	5
6-9	2	1	0	0	0	0	3
10+	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	30	5	2	0	1	0	38

Staff Table 2

- ▷ Reveals the relation between part-time paid staff and the number of part-time positions for training and internship
- ▷ 27 organizations have 0 part time funded positions; 6 do not have part time paid staff

**Staff Table 2:** Count of organizations by part-time paid staff & number of funded part-time positions for training & internship

Number of PT paid staff	Zero (0) PT funded	1 FT funded	2 PT funded	3-5 PT funded	6-9 PT funded	10+ PT funded	Total
0	6	0	0	0	0	0	6
1	6	3	0	0	0	0	9
2	6	1	1	0	0	0	8
3-5	6	3	0	1	0	0	10
6-9	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
10+	2	0	0	0	0	1	3
Total	27	7	1	2	0	0	37

Staff Table 3 (n=37)

- ▷ 28 (75.7%) of organizations that indicated a need for at least one FT paid staff do not have any funding for FT paid internship or trainee position
- ▷ 36 (92.3%) of organizations indicated a need for FT paid staff to fulfill their mandate.
- ▷ 8 (21.6%) organizations indicated that they have funding for at least one FT paid internship or trainee position

**Staff Table 3:** Count of organizations by full-time staff needed and number of funded full-time staff positions for training and internship

Number of FT paid staff needed	Zero (0) FT funded	1 FT funded	2 FT funded	3-5 FT funded	6-9 FT funded	10+ FT funded	Total
0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
1	12	0	0	0	0	0	12
2	7	4	1	0	0	0	12
3-5	7	1	1	0	1	0	10
6-9	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
10+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	29	5	2	0	1	0	37

Staff Matrix 1

- ▷ All organizations have at least one volunteer or paid staff
- ▷ 14 organizations have only paid staff (32%)
- ▷ 5 organizations have only volunteer staff (11%)
- ▷ 24 have both paid and volunteer staff (55%)
- ▷ 38 have at least 1 paid staff (88%)
- ▷ 29 have at least 1 volunteer staff (67%)

**Staff Matrix 1:** Count of organizations by volunteer and paid staff

	Does not have volunteer staff	Has volunteer staff	
Does not have paid staff	0	5	5
Has paid staff	14	24	38
	14	29	43

When we analyze the responses to two questions – how many staffing positions do you have, and how many intern/short-term positions do you have – we find that 29 (78%) organizations are operating with no paid staff at all (Table 3) and 29 (67%) have at least 1 volunteer staff. 8 (22%) organizations have funding for at least one paid FT internship or training position to help fill their staffing needs, but 28 (75.7%) do not have any funding for full time internship or training positions. 22 (51.5%) of organizations do not receive any funding for either full time or part time internships or trainee positions.

These numbers demonstrate the reliance of organizational human resource capacity on unfunded and/or short-term positions. As noted above, 36 (92.3%) of organizations indicated a need for FT paid staff to fulfill their mandate. These tables reveal the pressing human resource needs of organizations in rural, northern and remote communities. The dependence on short-term positions funded by a range of programs leaves organizations in difficult positions in terms of the longevity of programs, future planning and stability. In response to the eligibility and program requirements of internship and short-term project grant programs, organizations design new programs and training strategies for each subsequent hire. Organizations are under capacity overall, in terms of human resources to fulfill their core mandates.

When we examine the data further, we find that the organizations that provide services and programming for ‘priority’ and underserved communities (Indigenous, BPOC, LGBTQIA2+, Disabled) receive less funding across all governmental funding options despite offering greater arts service support to underserved and ‘priority’ communities. Nesting/resource sharing (61.5%) is nearly double of those not providing services to underserved communities.

**Underserved Table 2:** Organizations who provide a majority of programs and services to underserved populations broken down by source of funding

	Offering 50% or more of their services to underserved population	Proportion offering 50% or more of their services to underserved population	Offering less than 50% of their services to underserved population	Proportion offering less than 50% of their services to underserved population	Total
Nesting/resource sharing	8	61.5%	5	38.5%	13
Municipal in-kind	7	46.7%	8	53.3%	15
Federal arts grants	12	40.0%	18	60.0%	30
Provincial arts grants	14	35.0%	26	65.0%	40
Business/arts partnerships	9	34.6%	17	65.4%	26
Municipal grants	9	29.0%	22	71.0%	31

This is of concern, given that our findings demonstrate that municipalities fund 72% of organizations and have a significant influence on organizational stability for participants in our study. As Underserved Table 6 shows, organizational “nesting” and resource sharing with another organization is the only fund-type that provides greater support to underserved and priority communities. This fund-type is offered within the arts sector (non-governmental) and based on collaboration or developed inter-organizational relationships. These relationships lack quantified and qualified data, but they are an integral part of the arts ecosystem.

**Underserved Table 6:** Organizations who provide a majority of programs and services to underserved populations broken down by source of funding

	Offering 50% or more of their services to underserved population	Rate of funding for organizations offering 50% or more of their services to underserved population (n=15)	Offering less than 50% of their services to underserved population	Rate of funding for organizations offering less than 50% of their services to underserved population (n=28)
Nesting/resource sharing	8	53.3%	5	21.7%
Municipal in-kind	7	46.7%	8	34.8%
Federal arts grants	12	80.0%	18	78.3%
Provincial arts grants	14	93.3%	26	113.0%
Business/arts partnerships	9	60.0%	17	73.9%
Municipal grants	9	60.0%	22	95.7%

Chronic under-funding and low staff levels is a primary issue in the sector and causes organizations to operate strictly at ‘maintenance’ levels. Increased funding for paid staff positions would enable an organization to assist the arts sector beyond this state and address organizational and human burnout. The other effect of under-funding and low staff levels is high turnover within the sector.

Circle conversant: In this [arts] ecosystem, [I’m] trying to think about how to move forward. What I’m curious about is where are these people going? We lose them to other sectors. Last year I had two incredible employees and I lost them to other sectors. They paid more.

Organizations that lose staff also lose organizational continuity, intraorganizational and community relationships, and systems knowledge and stability. The loss of an arts organization, through instabilities in staffing, funding and other fluctuations, affects the community because rural and northern communities do not have access to multiple arts organizations; often it is one or two organizations that offer projects, programs and operational supports to the municipality and other organizations within the community itself

(and it's notable that many northern and isolated communities do not have any formal arts organizations). For example, an arts organization that closes might mean there are no longer arts workshops for youth or organizing capacity and volunteers for festivals. When this is the case, community members go to other communities if they want to participate in artistic practice or as an audience.

In one of our conversations, arts administrators noted that many organizations rely on one sustaining individual; this person adopts all roles and serves as the institutional memory bank for the organization. The discussion led to brainstorming solutions: how to collaborate effectively using digital methods, what that would mean across organizations, how to also effectively collaborate with other sector organizations to diminish competition and help each other and further, how to tell effective stories about arts organizations and their work:

Circle conversant: ...arts and administrators in smaller spaces tend to have to wear all of the hats in the orgs. SO you're expected to be an expert in all of these different ways. I've heard this a lot in different settings, like conferences and other discussions. I'd like to, in my tongue-and cheek way, have a business card that lists all of the roles I have to do: ED, head of payroll, bookkeeper, marketing lead, cleaner, janitor... just list all the things so that people would be like, "is this a joke?", and I'd say, "No, I'm running an organization by myself." I'm a one person organization. I have contract employees that come and go, but I'm the only one who is sustainable who has to keep up all these expectations...They just really don't understand that when you are one person... they still don't get that you are doing everything.

We need to drive it home, but in a very direct way. Advocating, and that communication piece about how important the arts are, what you do, because there is a lot of behind the scenes work that art support orgs do that isn't public facing, but it affects public-facing community programs and how things function down the road. We always have these lovely conferences and we have these discussions, and it's artists and arts admins speaking to the same things all the time. But we're preaching to the choir. There's something that would be really great about advocacy that we could take to those cross-sector conferences and organizations and board meetings. Why can't we present to the Chamber of Commerce? Why can't we start going to these non-arts related things? We can invite those folks to us, but it's not the same; we need to infiltrate it in a different way. But, it takes collaboration, capacity, it takes time, but we all seem to be stretched very thin.

Results from our survey regarding types of organizations, staffing and representation show that, both regionally and nationally, organizations are underfunded and function without adequate capacity in relation to the work that they do to support artists, audiences, and communities in Canada. Organizations need human capacity — staffing — in order to meet expectations of funders, communities, and audiences. Yet, the majority of the respondents to our survey rely more heavily on volunteer capacity than paid staff; one reason for this is that some types of funding are limited to certain types of organizations (for instance, operational funding for an ASO or non-profit arts organization); another is that applying for funding or any form of financial

resource takes time, as does hiring and training staff members. Continuity affects staffing; funding rules can deeply affect organizational continuity. For example, funding that prevents re-hiring or training of interns affects not only the community (as the community loses a job), but also succession mentoring and training. The knowledge garnered by the short-term hire leaves the organization, the community and/or the sector. In an urban center – which has a greater variety of employment possibilities and a much larger demographic – the organization is less affected because there are more resources from which to draw support. If an organization knows these resources exist, that knowledge can help them in their future planning.

**Staff Table 4**

- ▷ 23 (62.1%) organizations that indicated a need for at least one PT paid staff do not have any funding for PT paid internship or trainee position
- ▷ 33 (89.2%) organizations indicated a need for PT paid staff to fulfill their mandate
  - ▶ similar to the comment in Table 3 - this should be interpreted as the total number of staff needed to fulfill the mandate.
- ▷ 11 (29.7) organizations indicated that they have funding for at least one PT paid internship or trainee positions
- ▷ 22 (51.2%) organizations do not receive any funding for either FT or PT internship or trainee positions

**Staff Table 4:** Count of organizations by part-time staff needed and number of funded part-time staff positions for training and internship

Number of FT paid staff	Zero (0) FT funded	1 FT funded	2 FT funded	3-5 FT funded	6-9 FT funded	10+ FT funded	Total
0	3	1	0	0	0	0	4
1	10	1	0	0	0	1	12
2	8	4	1	1	0	0	14
3-5	5	1	0	0	0	0	6
6-9	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
10+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	26	7	1	2	0	1	37

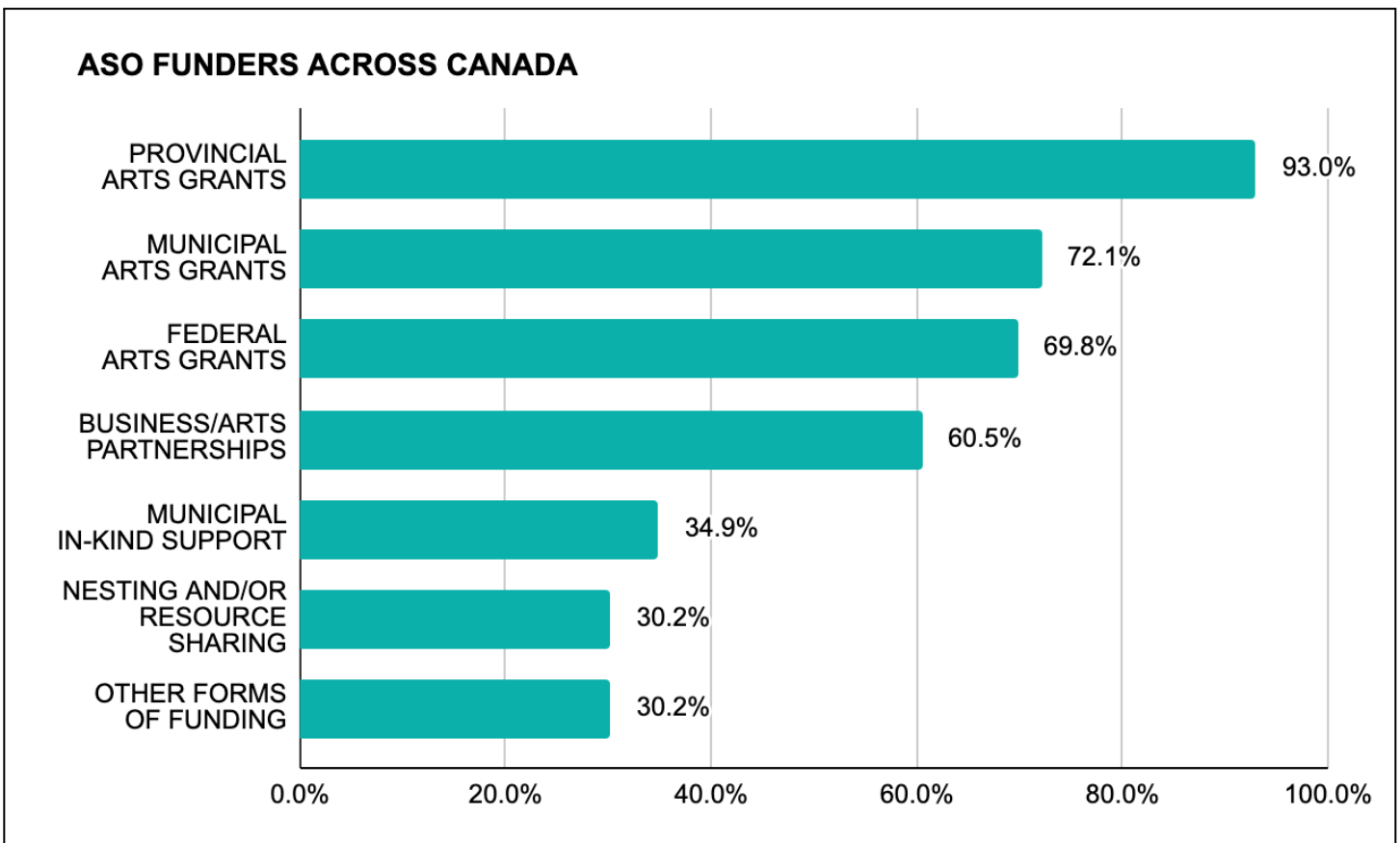
Smaller communities are affected by provincial funding priorities. They also compete for funding with organizations in urban communities, as well within their own rural regions and communities. It is difficult to move beyond specific project funding, for example, and into programming and longer term funding without resources (staffing, onsite space and administration or digital platforms) to enable it. Small municipalities have competing interests and a smaller network of businesses to draw upon for sponsorships and donations.



In addition, granting agencies tend to assess funding parity based on dollars per capita; however, organizations working within rural and northern communities incur additional expenses and pressures on their human resource capacity and budgets (such as costs to mount exhibitions, higher internet and phone expenses and/or distances between communities). They are also affected by social and economic disparities, equipment and resource gaps and fewer alternative sources of revenue. Context and gaps must be considered alongside per capita investments to address inequity.

### Sector Funding

Provincial and federal funders need to recognize the rural realities that inform the applications of artists and arts organizations from rural and northern communities in Canada. Provincial, municipal, federal grants are main sources of funding, followed by funds offered through business and arts partnerships.



As our conversations with arts sector administrators revealed, there is a misperception of rural realities. This misperception has become a critical barrier to the success of rural artists in sustaining municipal funding and to obtain equitable funding from provincial and federal funders. Some of this is related to how rural and northern regions are perceived by larger funders, intra-community disparities related to geography and diversities between rural and northern communities (demographic, size, cultural, ethnic, and underserved populations):

Circle conversant 1: The granting bodies are designed to assist privilege because [larger organizations] have the budgets to pay someone to write the grants or they have the know-how in terms of how to fill them out. The applications are elitist and awkward and difficult; I recently helped an indigenous artist complete a grant to the CCA to tour in Manitoba. And he couldn't...he'd never applied before, and he's an established artist, and it was very challenging for him. We got the grant, but that shows there are a lot of artists out there, or arts orgs, that don't know how, or can't submit, a properly completed application. But why should that prevent them from getting funding?

Circle conversant 2: ...Within the year, I had almost doubled application submissions from the region into several granting programs, by supporting artists. I would help them to develop their grant strategies and submissions, and review their grant applications and give feedback before they pressed submit. It shows that support for artists in rural and northern regions increases the quantity and quality of submissions. It's not out of lack of interest or need that artists and orgs aren't applying or submitting strong applications, it's about lack of access and knowing how to write them, and having the support to do it.

Circle conversant 3: The relationship building takes time. It's intimidating for a rural community, organization, artist or collective to call. You can't call CCA, you can't get feedback from them...So, there's something really empowering to have someone who is within a rural community, you know kind of where they live, you could know them or you might not know them, but that they live in a northern space, when you [I] talk to them you say, I understand. And that helps people ask for assistance, otherwise that's a big barrier too, to constantly try to explain and not understanding will not help you write applications or to advocate properly.

Funders also need to recognize that population demographics, universal definitions for all regions in Canada and fee structures for rural regions that are on par with urban cities are unrealistic:

Circle conversant 1: What Winnipeg would view as a professional artist looks very different from a professional artist across Manitoba. I have a board member who is a certified art therapist that applied to run [local] programming...[to fill in a gap in our local arts education that has emerged as a result of local organizations being unable to pay instructor fees, mileage costs etc.]. The feedback that she was given on the [unsuccessful] application was, 'we need to send you help from Winnipeg to run this program' because her certificate, her knowledge, her experience wasn't professional enough. And that goes with what [other conversant] said about the elitist mentality. Until you're living in a rural community and you have to do all your learning online because you can't afford the gas, and you're doing it over four years instead of one, the definitions need to be split and applicable to the community or area that the applications are coming from. And they need people who have been there and struggled through it, to do the assessing.

Circle conversant 2: I know it's really good to pay artists equitable fees, but I would love to hear what rural organizations across Canada feel about the pressures CARFAC fees are putting on them when

they don't get as much funding. When those rates are really designed for Vancouver and TO realities. It's placed a huge struggle on our rural arts organizations...

Circle conversant 3: Rural looks different, supports look different, how things are graded needs to not be a blanket slate. Impact is one too...impact to a smaller community for a funded project looks very different from the impact of something in Vancouver, for instance. To compare the two is an impossibility.

Complicating the challenges, the arts administrators that we spoke with were emphatic that local investment by municipalities and community businesses and organizations was important to ensure stability for the creative sector in communities. In very small communities, multi-sector relationships are critical. Inadequate or inequitable funding is highly stressful for arts organizations because their roles are diverse: they offer activities, events, training and other creative opportunities for the community, on top of other socio-economic expectations from the municipality and the business sectors, as well as developing municipal policies, mentoring and other tasks. One administrator spoke about the myriad roles they have to play on top of the arts programming they are formally funded to execute. In order to involve local artists in programming, they needed to address the lack of childcare and transportation in the community. They began to provide summer programs for children, which their funder noted, was not part of their mandate. Competing expectations from the community hampers the arts organization's ability to function within their official mandate, to be responsive and also have adequate resources.

The administrators in one circle noted that a small arts organization can be used by industry and businesses whose work is extractive (such as resource industry companies). Municipalities advocate for sponsorship from these companies; this sponsorship is directed to events or festivals that are organized by the arts organization. The arts organization is often expected to curb protest regarding the business practices of the sponsor. If there is protest, the arts organization may be reprimanded by the municipal system. They noted it is challenging when municipalities and industry work close together, and arts organizations organize events that benefit the entire community but have little say in the sponsorship and its terms, especially when there are few options for funding. The collaborative relationship between the arts organization and the municipality is inequitable and the municipality's relationship with the business is also inequitable. A more equitable collaboration is necessary so that the values of the community are not compromised.

Our survey showed that arts organizations often work in collaboration to share resources, and are willing to collaborate more — but collaboration also requires capacity, organization, security and investment of time by the arts organizations. Instability affects all organizations, regardless of whether they are collaborating or not. One example from our rounds of conversations was related to an ad hoc organization that was using the resources of an ASO and adding to its administration burden, but not reciprocating with forms of assistance — such as volunteering at one of the ASO events.

We learned BC's regional ASO, BC Arts, has prioritized 'rural' in its funding and support mechanisms. This direction emerged from strong advocacy that demonstrated the relevance and importance of 'rural' arts. In

addition, there's a lot of interesting cross-sectoral projects within BC, such as collaborations between sectors (arts and environment or arts and land). The focus on rural regions in BC can positively affect the intra-regional relationships between municipalities and local organizations. In addition, enabling cross-sectoral relationships increases capacity and potential funding sources, increases participation by a greater representation of community members and other forms of audience. Digital offerings may also do this.

The question of sustainability across the arts sector speaks to a larger systemic issue about business models. It may be necessary for arts organizations to 'reinvent' their business models so that they can be sustainable and also support ad hoc groups adequately. Funding options are limited to project or vision driven applications; in order to continue so that they can support other organizations in rural and northern regions, as well as their own operations, for example, the Manitoba Arts Network is working with a business professional to establish a long-term vision. As the Regional Coordinator pointed out, in her organization "everyone does everything, but they don't have a business degree or marketing degree." She added that arts organizations tend to operate on optimism and hard work: "we're going to figure it out", but sustainability needs professional help more than a positive attitude. Not every organization would be able to hire a professional, but could benefit from one organization doing so and sharing information.

Internships and mentorships are very important to the sector. They help to build the capacities required to renew and expand the leadership and human resource needs of organizations, which builds stronger cultural ecosystems; in rural spaces, the opportunity to work in the field of choice is expanded by workplace training provided through internship programs. However, it needs to be recognized that (as noted elsewhere in this report), arts organizations rely heavily on mentorships (in some cases, they are the only funded positions in the organization). For already under capacity organizations, the pressures to train interns and financially contribute to the expense can add to the stressors of organizational leads. Internship and mentorship programs need to be robust – meaningful to both the individuals and the organizations, and they must be adequately supported (the interns and the organizational mentors). This means that the programs must have enough duration to both provide the training required to advance in the sector, and enable the internship to contribute to the host organization<sup>6</sup>. Administrators spoke about the necessity for flexible programs that allow inter-organizational work-shares, longer programs and expanded understanding of the skills required to work in the cultural sector. An Ontario-based arts administrator pointed out that the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC) eliminated the newly accessible two-year internship term during the pandemic: it is now only available for those needing formal accreditation, which largely supports the for-profit trades. With no undergraduate, graduate or certificate programs in arts administration or curatorial studies available in the region, internships are an important avenue for this specialized training. Funders need to recognize the gaps and the very particular knowledge and skills required for creative and administrative functions in the arts sector.

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<sup>6</sup> These challenges and related strategies are also highlighted in *Circulations* (MANO, 2022).

## Federal & Provincial Funding Strategies

### *Provincial & Federal Arts Sector Granting*

- ▷ Reevaluate existing operational grants allocated to small organizations that work in rural and northern communities, with the aim of bringing more parity to these organizations in light of the additional barriers these organizations face.
- ▷ Adapt and create strategic funding programs to support small rural, northern and isolated arts organizations and communities.
- ▷ Consider a baseline operational grant which provides a realistic base for organizational capacity.
- ▷ Consider long-term project grants to reduce HR drain, increase stability and project impact.
- ▷ Consider reinvesting in capacity building project grants (micro grants and short and long term grants) targeted at small organizations working in rural and northern communities.
- ▷ Expand eligibility requirements to allow more collaborative submissions by organizations and develop strategic granting programs to support inter and intra region/community collaborations so that very small communities can support an organization between them.
- ▷ Consider expanding maximum grant numbers per year to priority group organizations and those working in northern communities.
- ▷ Digital and other strategic programs must allow for realistic administrative budgets to enable small and under-capacity organizations to support new programs. Ideally, these projects are long-term.
- ▷ Develop and/or reinstate regional representatives (for, and living in, Northern and rural areas) to ensure better understanding of the nuances, needs and gaps organizations in these regions face. Increase awareness of provincial and federal funding programs as well as application support. To increase viability, representative positions could be co-shared by funders.

### *Internships & Other Short-Term Training Programs<sup>7</sup>*

- ▷ Allow organizations with a strong history of programming and evidence of administrative capacity to apply (both formally incorporated and unincorporate applicants).
- ▷ Allow ad hoc and incorporated organizations to share an intern in order to increase the flexibility of training programs.
- ▷ Allow arts administrators to rehire former staff into similar positions so that organizations become skilled at training for particular positions (such as arts administration, curatorial, arts education or communications), and advanced or continuous learning is available for interns.
- ▷ Allow mentorships of varying durations, such as months or years, and enable part-time mentorship opportunities to increase training and future capacity.. In addition, allow for flexibility in the scope of the mentorship, as defined by the needs of the applicant.

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<sup>7</sup> Adapted from *Circulations: Navigating the Digital in Northern Ontario* (MANO, 2022)

- ▷ Recognize the specialized skills and knowledge required for administrative and creative leadership in the arts sector.
- ▷ Expand programs to allow intra-organizational mentorship and nesting to build arts administration capacity with the sector, which would mean mentorship of existing staff and volunteers within organizations.
- ▷ Adapt the required financial contribution so that programs are more accessible to smaller organizations. For instance, one strategy might be a sliding scale, or percent maximum, of the annual operating budget.

## *Role of Municipalities*

This research has documented the importance of municipal relationships, and the significant role that municipalities can play in the expanded capacity, development, presence and impact of the cultural sector in rural and northern communities. The data demonstrates that consistent and long-term municipal investment in arts organizations – in the forms of funding, promotion, storytelling and in-kind resources – ensures significant stability for arts organizations. In addition, the organizations are able to leverage this funding for other stacked funding from different agencies, can forecast their operating budgets and, as a result, provide more consistent programming in local communities, with greater impact.

Arts organizations effectively expand municipal capacity through the provision of cultural programming (larger cities often have internal Arts and Culture Coordinators or other staff with cultural portfolios and dedicated budgets). Northern municipalities, particularly rural ones, often function with limited and insufficient staff and with limited operating budgets. A healthy relationship, along with shared resourcing and investments where possible, can mutually benefit municipalities, their residents, and local arts organizations.

In our conversations, there was acknowledgement from each region regarding the support that municipalities offer in the form of in-kind and municipal funds – in some communities, the funding had largely remained unchanged for over a decade, but the organizations acknowledged that small, rural and northern municipalities also juggle conflicting priorities and provide funding for a range of organizations. In BC, it was noted, municipalities in small and larger communities have been shown to regularly privilege a smaller subsection of organizations consistently over time, to the detriment of Indigenous, underserved populations, newer organizations, and minority groups. This is supported by recent research, conducted by Dominique Clément, that analyzes the financial reports from various BC municipalities, over decades.

Another project, an in-depth 2022 research by Northern Manitoba-based Strategic Moves/ImagiNorthern, surveyed 282 artists (within a range of disciplines) and 27 arts organizations across Northern Manitoba. The research found that artists struggle to earn a living through their creative practices, with only 15% earning more than 50% of their total income from the arts (Strategic Moves/ImagiNorthern 3-4). Their findings were consistent with our research: the report noted that “...opportunities to make a solid living from the arts is more limited [in rural, northern and Indigenous communities] than in urban centers like Winnipeg” (3). Their

report concluded that “the arts and craft sectors generate much of its value from unpaid work” (4), citing for instance, that 40% receive no pay at all from teaching [arts]. (4) There is clearly a significant capacity issue and work to be done by economic development agencies, rural development agencies, municipalities and other organizations to address these issues. Artists contribute to local economies through tourism attraction, and to the quality of life of residents, yet aren’t adequately supported or remunerated for their work.

Local arts organizations often work closely with their municipalities, yet the role of the organization and the expectations from municipalities are varied. For instance, administrators spoke about the expectations from the municipality that they assist in developing and writing policies, participate as members of multiple boards and committees, and report on impact and other functions; these additional roles stretch the capacity of the organization. In exchange, municipal capacity is expanded without a defined benefit to the organization. Further, conversants noted that how municipalities value the arts is very mixed. In some cases, the municipality’s data-driven form of measuring impact may be difficult for the organization to prepare and, if the municipality feels that the organization is not impactful enough, they may dismiss other forms of effect that the arts organization generates within the community. Yet, there are demonstrable effects through municipal and business sectors: for example, municipalities often use cultural activities in tourism campaigns, and the draw of a strong arts and culture scene is a mechanism for real estate and other investments. The administrators felt the art sector role and contribution is underplayed, and they need to be seen as partners and important cultural and economic contributors to community development and activation.

The creative sector also contributes to the local economy and systems of exchange. Research by Strategic Moves/ImagiNorth found that, in Manitoba, “...artists and makers reported that they sell about half of their products in Northern Manitoba and half outside of the region in Manitoba, across Canada and internationally”. However, there is a disparity between artist supply purchases outside of Northern Manitoba and local purchases: “...the proportion of supply purchases from outside Northern Manitoba makes up 66% of all purchases, while local supply makes up about 23%” (5). With approximately half of sales staying within the province, there is room to build outside markets (where shipping is not prohibitive).

In addition to these struggles, few arts organizations have the budgets to support professional development, yet leaders of small arts organizations must be versed in all aspects of operations from project management and projections, to personnel management and payroll. In a research project by the Media Arts Network of Ontario (MANO) that focused on northern Ontario, facilitators heard from participants that training and education opportunities are needed both within distinct artistic practices and within the ‘business’ of the arts. Strategic Moves/ImagiNorthern had similar findings, noting that “71% say they would benefit from training in business skills” and further, “By discipline, the survey revealed a great lack of confidence in business skills and skills related to the artistic eco-system” (5).



## **Municipal Funding & In-Kind Supports**

Our survey revealed that provincial funding is the most accessed by all of our survey respondents, followed by municipal, federal and business arts partnerships. This demonstrates the range of funding that organizations need. What is particularly relevant is that when factoring in both municipal grants and municipal in-kind support (such as access to office and meeting space or reduced fees, etc.), municipal support outweighs other supports by a significant factor: 46 organizations rely on municipal support, 40 organizations access provincial funding, 30 organizations are funded federally, and 26 organizations are funded from business arts partnerships.

While BC clearly is the highest recipient of municipal support (also affected by the number of BC responses compared to other regions), and levels vary region to region, the data demonstrates that municipal funding is key to organizations in rural and Northern communities. For small organizations that might not be eligible for operating funding from provincial and federal funders, municipal funding is the main regular source of funding for ASOs. When this funding is unstable or irregular, local arts organizations are more vulnerable.

## **Types of Funding by Region**

In a study that examined trends in municipal funding for community service organizations (CSO's) in both small and large municipalities in BC (which include arts organizations and community groups), municipalities offer a wide range of support for non-profit organizations in communities, such as in-kind funding, land use, property tax, and procurement assistance, access to municipal buildings, waiving municipal fees, assistance from municipal staff, and facilitation toward collaboration with other CSO's.

By funding organizations within the arts sector, which enables scaffolding of funding, municipalities receive injections of external sources of funding from federal and provincial funders; there is a cascade benefit for the municipality (Clément 169).

The study also reveals that small municipalities can only offer modest amounts of funding, and its allocation may be erratic from year to year. In addition (a concern noted by participants in our research as well), the funding allocation may privilege a subset of organizations disproportionately over time. Funding practices that benefit some organizations over others creates competition, and organizations who are well-resourced, professionalized, and larger may be advantaged in their grant applications over smaller and volunteer-run organizations. Another effect is that a lack of funding for smaller organizations affects the ability of marginalized and underserved populations to advocate for their interests or engage fully with their communities. As Clément points out;

These funding practices have potential consequences for the non-profit sector. As other studies have shown, when the available funding is concentrated among a small number of organizations, there is an increased likelihood of competition among organizations (Jenkins and Halcli 1999; Ramos 2006). And, as Hall et al. (2005) notes, "the larger, more professionalized, and well-resourced organizations have



substantial competitive advantages over the smaller, mostly volunteer-operated ones” (see also Elson 2016; Liao 2017). In Canada, where there are limited opportunities for private funding (e.g., foundations), the difficulty that smaller or newer CSOs might face in securing public funding limits opportunities for the development of a diverse non-profit sector (Hall et al. 2005)...if CSOs are a vehicle for marginalized Canadians to engage with their communities or advocate their interests, then the lack of funding for smaller, volunteer based organizations might be a detriment to fostering an engaged civil society (Eliadis 2015).” (Clément 175)

What kind of funding ASOs and ad hoc collectives receive is also important. Municipal funding is typically project based, while operational funding for arts organizations tends to be federal or provincial. Federal and provincial funding bodies publish their funding allocations, and they also collect data regarding the organizations that receive funding, including where they are located geographically. Municipalities, as the study describes, are difficult to research in relation to where their funding dollars are allocated because of the differences in municipality ‘type’ and also the variations in how they allocated and report funding.

For art sector organizations in Manitoba, ‘status quo’ funding at the municipal level for a small town is a norm – in the three years that one of the respondents had been in her position, provincial and municipal funding dollars hadn’t changed. In our regional conversation group, one participant noted that her organization only receives municipal and provincial funding, and in the ten years that she has been in her position, only two of her four municipal funders had raised the funds from 1.00/capita to 2.00/capita. She considers that a success because of her many years of lobbying. In addition, in small communities, the municipalities don’t support the art councils at a level that would enable the arts councils to do more; funding barely enables them to sustain their current status; sometimes the art councils are supported at a lesser level than the libraries – who already benefit from municipally staffed positions.

While municipalities may support the arts sector in general, and could support it more through a range of in-kind and where possible, financial supports, internal priorities and realities within the municipality dictate the funding and its distribution over single, or multiple, years. Low staff turnover at the municipal level can create organizational stasis, rather than innovation. On the other hand, municipalities also are subject to Council changes as elections can create political turnover every four years, requiring arts organizations to regularly rebuild relationships with members of Council. In rural and northern regions, turn-over amidst municipal in-kind can cause stasis. To address instability, it was suggested that arts councils or sector organizations could try to address the idea of a more formal partnership to develop an actual paid staff or program made available through the municipality.

One of the arts administrators explained this in conversation:

Our community is unique, maybe, a town of 200 people, we are an incorporated municipality. There’s not a tax service that exists that adequately funds non-profit organizations. There is \$10,000 a year for every non-profit that exists in [our area]. We receive, on average, \$1000.00 from our municipality. The importance of the relationship that we have is in the buildings. If the buildings fall into disrepair, we

can't do anything. I sit on two committees for the municipality: one is for buildings, lands and use, the other is a visioning committee for the community, part of the Official Plan. I have a degree in theatre and [not] community planning. But all of it is tied to what our organization will be able to do in the future based on the buildings we work in. I feel grateful the staff and Council and Mayor are all on board with [my organization] right now, because they want to see us succeed; but that is not the position I [originally] stepped into. We had a huge government turnover – it puts a small town into disarray when we have all these people, and then, all of a sudden, we can't do anything, and nothing can move forward.

As mentioned earlier in this report, another barrier organizations face is that while some financial support needs to come from the three levels of government (municipal, provincial, and federal), community and audience habits also dictate the effect of the arts on communities and how organizations are perceived by funders. It is a challenge in rural and northern communities to be able to both quantify and qualify, in data and stories, the values of the programs, projects, and operations of the arts organization to funders, municipal councils, and the community. As one person explained, "We're close to a bigger centre; we're 40 minutes away from [provincial city]... so you know, people just don't walk the walk when it comes to supporting local. They don't want us to leave, but they don't necessarily come out." Another agreed, noting that:

....it's honestly just a matter of priority, because you can see tangible results with the kid who starts hockey at age 5 and where they will get to at age 18. That's part of the problem; if you don't have tangible data, tangible examples, tangible stories that we can give to our funders where we can say, "because this child took an art class at age 5, here's where they could be at 18." Those funders, it's data they look for...they do want the heartwarming stories, but they want to see that if they give this money to the arts, how much is going to go back into the community. That's the bottom line; they have to look at where they're going to spend their money. And if the town needs a new fire engine, it honestly is a matter of priority.

Participants noted that in smaller communities where sports and recreation are popular activities, it can be difficult to make the case for arts investments; communities understand that years of training in hockey or another sport provides a range of skills for young people, but are less aware of the longitudinal impacts of the arts. It was clear from the conversations that storytelling – qualitative and quantitative – is critical for communicating the impact of the arts, and attracting investments. When municipalities invest consistently, the impact on local communities is significant. Stable funding enables organizations to more effectively contribute to their local communities. In Hearst (Northern Ontario) stable and consistent operating funding has contributed to robust cultural programming. In Manitoba, Strategic Moves/ImagiNorthern found similar results in their arts sector research:

There are a number of examples of publicly funded arts organizations in small remote communities that through consistent public support have delivered a tremendous amount of value across artistic

disciplines to their local economy and the well-being of the community and individuals; becoming destinations in and of themselves:

- ▷ Klondike Institute for Arts and Culture, Dawson City, YT, population: 1,700 - \$1 million budget (90% public, 10% earned)
- ▷ Island Mountain Arts, Wells, BC, population 400
- ▷ Tiny Lights Festival, Ymir, BC, population 800

(Strategic Moves/ImagiNorthern 68)

## Insurance

Organizations are also facing difficult decisions due to the dramatically rising costs of insurance. In Ontario, Near North Mobile Media Lab (N2M2L) closed their long term mobile lab (a retrofitted, fully equipped media lab RV) as a result of an increase in insurance expenses to \$18,000 per year. The loss of the mobile lab represents a major loss to the organization and the region: it functioned to support contemporary media arts creation in communities throughout the north as the only program of its kind in the region. Northern Ontario lacks contemporary creation spaces and digital/media equipment access; the Near North Media Lab provided both the space and training opportunities for emerging artists. Its structure (an RV) enabled it to travel to small and remote Northern communities that otherwise, because of geography, would have been unable to access the resources it offered.

The Municipality has an event hosting program. We've given up on applying to them... makes events not viable if they only provide \$20. Is that a viable responsible action? They're setting them [arts groups] up to fail. They have a band shell space, but we can't use it, unless we have \$5m insurance and WSIB. How as an ad hoc or a small non-profit are we supposed to do that? To have a balloon artist to make balloons we need \$5m liability and WSIB.

Yes, we need advocacy regarding liability. It's really changing the cultural landscape.

Ice follies is potentially uninsurable and is one of the most interesting contemporary arts programs in the region. The insurance company is now charging a \$300 fee just to do business with them. Insurance for CI has quadrupled in the last four years.

Ice Follies, a festival held on Lake Nipissing in Northern Ontario, is facing such high insurance costs that it could affect their future ability to run the festival. Ice Follies is an important contemporary art event that responds to the geography (and seasons) of the region, as well as the lack of indoor contemporary art spaces. The loss of these two organizations and their projects will have a far-reaching impact. They contribute to a creative cluster that has enabled a strong digital media arts presence in the North Bay region, supported artistic creation and presenting throughout the region and provided contemporary art opportunities for

northern artists.<sup>8</sup> Creative Industries noted that their organizational insurance has quadrupled in the last four years – for a small organization, this is significant, especially when considering that they’ve only just been accepted into the operating funding program at the Ontario Arts Council, and they receive a relatively small grant. Insurance issues contribute to the lack of – and loss of – capacity; in Northern Ontario, this affects the creation of digital arts, digital infrastructure development and the establishment of digital strategies.

Reflecting on the conversations and experiences shared throughout this research project, it is clear that when organizations have funding and capacity, communities and artists benefit from reciprocity, or a virtuous circle, comprised of organizational, geographic, community based media arts creation, presentation, engagement, and collaborations. These are accompanied by vibrant conversations and engagement in contemporary media arts practices. Such clusters are noticeable around North Bay, for instance, where there are several funded organizations with both project and core/operating funding, including the Near North Mobile Media Lab (n2m2l), New Adventures in Sound Art (NAISA), and White Water Gallery (WWG). Several other organizations are located in Sudbury. The proximity of organizations to each other has enabled cross-pollinations and collaborations, such as the Ice Follies Festival, and an ability to generate conversations and programs among each other and develop strategies for supporting artists. Elsewhere in the region however, such as in Sault Ste. Marie or northwest of the region, there is a noticeable gap in well funded organizations across the media arts sector. (MANO 260)

## **Community Foundations & Municipalities**

A research project called *Finding New Pathways to Sustainability* – conducted in a partnership between Creative Industries (CI) and the North Bay & Area Community Foundation (NBACF) in Northeastern Ontario – is helping to identify the opportunities and challenges that arise in securing sustainable funding approaches and investments in the arts.

As part of the research, the project documents CI's process and the actions it undertook in partnership with NBACF to establish a long-term fund to develop a more sustainable micro-grant program for this North Bay and area arts community. The project is exploring multiple different approaches, including engaging municipalities as partners to create a flow-through for non-profit organizations to access sustainable dollars and diversify revenue streams. This kind of partnership would alleviate the need to obtain charitable status (a move that weighs heavily on low capacity arts organizations), and empower non-profits to establish funds, and access foundation funding programs.

In their research of municipal partnerships in a number of communities across Ontario and elsewhere in Canada, they found that while there are many successful and celebrated partnerships, there are also

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<sup>8</sup> For more on the impact of the North Bay cluster, please see the Media Arts of Ontario (MANO) digital strategies report, *Circulations*.

resistances that emerge from some municipalities, and an overall misunderstanding and confounding interpretation from community members about how non-profits function. These concerns largely stem from perceptions about spending; the concerns emerge from some municipalities not understanding the viability, legality and impact of these partnerships with the non-profit sector.

For instance, trends in charitable donations and charitable organization budgets demonstrate an expectation that the money is spent in the community, rather than also supporting the operating functions of the organization. While this concern ensures that organizations do not pay large salaries to staff and or have high expenditures office space, the reality is that most organizations in small communities seek charitable contributions. This is done either directly, if they have charitable status, or as a flow through the municipality (or other qualified donee partner). Arts organizations are underfunded and under capacity. As one respondent noted:

It only takes \$2 to feed a child, but this \$2 does not account for paying the person who made the bread, served the bread, cleaned up after. It doesn't cover the rent of the facility, chairs, tables, the cost to make the commercial, and so on. It doesn't reflect the cost of the organizers, managers and other staff, who should be able to earn a living wage. We need a system change in how we think about or understand how non-profits and charities work. It should be OKAY to support all of the things that allow the child to eat, but folks ONLY want to pay or support the slice of bread. We need better, overall understanding and recognition of the background and 'unseen work' that goes into non-profit organizations. This level of scrutiny is not the same for for-profit or other corporations where paying skilled folks at multiple levels of production is expected when wanting to achieve success.

There are many examples of municipalities supporting local non-profit organizations: they act as the eligible donors and/or flow through for charitable funds; establish partnerships with their local Community Foundations to attract and distribute donations to local organizations; and establish funding programs directly within their Community Foundations to distribute dollars to the community. While the benefits of these partnerships can be clearly seen and felt by the non-profits organizations, there are many positive outcomes for the partnering municipalities as well. These include increased transparency building and fostering strong community trust, development of equitable processes and diversifying monetary supports beyond taxpayer dollars, among other benefits.

With all of these mutually beneficial outcomes, there can still be resistance by some municipalities. Some concerns that research has uncovered about these flow-through partnerships are less actual than perceptual: for example, a perception of municipalities' inability to legally act as flow-through agents for community organizations, or that these activities would cause problems with the CRA. There are fears that such partnerships could raise liability issues for the partnering municipality and fears about establishing a new partnership and process that has not yet been done within that specific municipal setting. The research, however, has also demonstrated that there are many successful partnerships across Canada; these prove that the municipal concerns are largely unfounded. The project has also identified that knowledge building around

these partnerships is integral for empowering local arts organizations (and all non-profits), alleviating municipal concerns, and demonstrating that these partnerships exist in similar contexts, community sizes and municipal operating structures across Canada. Building this awareness is particularly relevant for Chief Financial Officers (CFOs), Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) Economic Development Officers (EDOs), and Municipal Councils; these are important leadership positions for facilitating partnership development.

Examples of municipal-organizational partnership relationships and municipal fund programs are available in the **resource section** of this report.<sup>9</sup>

## **Municipal Strategies**

*Local arts committees and arts community representation:* Many communities benefit from strong relationships with the arts sector. This is fostered by creating and/or supporting an arts committee, arts council or other structure that enables local cultural workers, organizational reps and individual artists to work with local municipalities to share resources, build awareness of the sector, create municipal cultural plans and collaborate on community programming. This kind of relationship building is very important because an awareness of the importance of knowledge transfer, social equity and trust that develops over time between organizational and municipal representatives can assist when there are transitions and changeover of staff and volunteers.

*Capacity building:* There are a number of ways that even small municipalities can impact the capacity of the arts sector. For instance, many arts organizations benefit from assistance with grant submissions and collaborative submissions. There is a benefit, too, from municipalities acting as the eligible donee for charitable donations (which would allow arts organizations to start long-term funds, unlock larger donations and the ability to apply for foundation-based funding). Very small organizations might benefit from assistance with payroll or accounting. Access to office equipment, like low cost printers, projectors and other equipment, or discounted rentals for meeting rooms and office space can expand budgets. Similarly, low cost or free permits have had a positive impact on the film sector and can also help local performing and presenting arts organizations. Access to low cost (or free) use of public spaces can create much more viable public arts programming – these are important considerations for municipalities that don't have their own municipal arts and culture portfolios and rely on local groups to animate the community and activate public spaces. With the prohibitive cost of insurance, municipalities might consider including local arts initiatives, projects, festivals and other public activities on their blanket insurance policies.

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<sup>9</sup> For additional information about rurality, community, economic development and the arts, please see: Developing and Revitalizing Rural Communities Through Arts and Culture: An International Literature Review and Inventory of Resources Prepared for the Creative City Network of Canada, in Small Cities Imprint (Vol 3 No. 1), 2011.

<https://smallcities.tru.ca/index.php/cura/article/view/39>

*Professional development:* To support the strength of local arts organizations and the capacity of artists in the community, explore opportunities to provide free and/or low cost professional development in a range of skills from marketing to partnership development, accounting to website development. There are a number of provincial and federal organizations that provide the ‘business of art’ workshops, but often need a local host to help promote and/or host both online and virtual programs. Another possibility is to consider supporting the professional development of local cultural workers by inviting them to planned municipal professional development activities, sometimes offered through Business Improvement Area (BIA) collaborations or the local library. Arts service organizations like Business and Arts NL offer collaborations between the business and arts community to provide services that enable skills development between arts and business sectors.

*Data and storytelling:* Reliable, relevant and community-level data is important for arts organizations and for municipalities to communicate their level of investment in the sector. Consider collaborating with arts organizations, on local economic development projects and other agencies to source, analyze and publicly share data about the impact of the arts in the community. Create a user friendly, public facing database to store and access data: for example, profile local organizations, their successes, their impacts and their programming on a dedicated arts and culture page on the municipal website. While communities benefit from a database of local artists, artisans and arts organizations, there may not be capacity in the arts sector to create and maintain such a database – work with the Economic Development Office (or in-house EDO) to create and maintain a database of local arts resources because such a database will generate more sales for local artists and support tourism initiatives. For small municipalities, internship and summer student programs help increase human resource capacity, and part of their work could be as communicators: to write stories and keep the website updated.

*Inter-municipal communications:* The knowledge of the arts sector and the various supports and strategies vary dramatically from community to community. It might be beneficial to propose arts and culture sessions with Municipal representatives at the local, regional, provincial and national levels, with the aim to explore how to more comprehensively support the sector so it can in turn more effectively animate local communities, activate public spaces and provide the programming that attracts tourism and retains residents. Consider sharing resources between municipalities, such as arts policies, approaches to insurance, how to act as eligible donees, partnership agreements and cultural plans. Consider working with other municipalities and arts organizations to develop a guide for supporting the arts sector (see [Digital Directions](#) for more about municipal guides).

*Generating local value:* Our research did not explore the arts market in terms of sales, importing of supplies and the exploring of value-added products, however, Strategic Moves/ImagiNorthern’s research, presented through Artists and Arts Organizations in Northern Manitoba: A Baseline Study (2022), clearly outlines the



need for municipalities, economic development agencies and other invested parties to develop public policy and examine strategies for a robust arts sector.<sup>10</sup>

*Insurance:* ASOs - Regional and federal ASOs might explore group programs for their memberships, consider establishing plans that are cross-disciplinary and allow non-members and individual artists to join when there aren't representative ASOs for a particular discipline or a discipline-specific ASO has been unable to broker group insurance programs. Inter-ASO group programs could be explored. More advocacy is needed regarding cultural worker benefits (for organizational members and for individual independent artists), and the impact of insurance costs on organizations. Municipalities - Municipalities might explore the inclusion of local organizations within their policies, particularly when projects are non-profit, contribute to generating tourism, and increase the quality of life for residents. The expansion of municipal insurance to cover city owned property or sites, like public bandshells, parks, busker stations and so on, would enable local organizations to activate these spaces, and do so affordably.

*Operating and project funding:* Where possible, invest annual operating funding toward local arts service organizations, as they in turn will help build the capacity of all arts organizations in the community and create a cascade effect for the investment. Consider also, particularly where there are no arts service organizations, or other local sources of arts funding or foundations, creating a project fund with an annual deadline, to support arts and culture projects by local arts organizations and artists. Some municipalities only provide funding to organizations, but this creates a gap for ad hoc groups and collectives. Ensuring that ad hoc collectives and groups are also eligible will provide broader opportunities for expanded programming and larger community impact. Some communities provide the funding based on a per capita basis, so they can more easily define these contributions. In smaller rural areas, collective investment by several municipalities can be a good strategy. Some municipalities provide an arts micro loan program, and these strategies can be explored with local Community Futures Development Corporations. Another proposed strategy is to develop formal partnerships between a local arts organization and the municipality to enable a shared, paid staff position or a targeted arts and culture program. Collaborations and partnerships will be structured differently from community to community; a range of strategies will create more resilience. Organizations need to ensure that any partnerships and shared strategies support their core programs and allow them to maintain the leadership, mission and vision of their organizations.

*Investments and charitable flow through:* Explore existing case studies and examples of municipal-community organization partnerships, including the establishment of Community Foundations that attract and distribute donations to local organizations; that act as an eligible donee for Charitable donations to local organizations; and that establish loan and investment funds. See examples of Municipal strategies and investment programs in the resource section.

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<sup>10</sup> See: Strategic Moves/ImagiNorthern: *Arts Organizations in Northern Manitoba: A Baseline Study*. Slide: "Northern economic development policy to support local artists and makers and building up the arts eco-system" (5).



*Digital handbooks and toolkits:* As with all the proposed digital guides and resources in this report, a survey of existing resources is necessary, in the event that platforms, tools, apps and other resources are already available, reproducible, adaptable and/or in development.

*Municipal guidebooks:* Given the importance of municipal relationships and support, and the range of experiences from community to community, a recommendation that was consistent across each region was to develop municipal guidebooks: one for municipalities to understand the needs of the arts sector, and the strategies that are possible and have been undertaken by other municipalities; and one for arts organizations to help develop and sustain municipal relationships.

### **1. *A Guide to Building Local Arts Capacity for Municipalities***

The guidebook might include templates, models/examples and strategies adopted by other municipalities in the following areas:

- ▷ Increasing viability: Blanket insurance, easy low or no-fee permits, access to low-fee and free public spaces, reduced rents for programming and operations, meeting spaces
- ▷ Administrative support: bookkeeping, payroll
- ▷ Leveraging other funds: grant submission support, support letters, co-application, acting as eligible donee
- ▷ Investments: project and operating grants for groups, organizations and individual artists, percentage of municipal operating budget/or dollar amount per taxpayer toward art activity, and public art, etc.
- ▷ EcDev: data re: impact on local economy, tourism, and ways to build the creative economy
- ▷ Profile and storytelling: Municipal arts webpages, links to organizations, projects and activities on website, arts and artist directories
- ▷ Relationship building: arts committees, advisories and/or arts councils
- ▷ Resources: existing research and data regarding arts and culture; organizations, ASOs, agencies and institutes working to support enhanced arts and culture in rural and northern communities

### **2. *Working with Municipalities: A Handbook for the Cultural Sector***

The guide might include, in addition to items in the municipal guide, such things as:

- ▷ Partnership agreements
- ▷ Examples of existing models, successes
- ▷ Summary of rights (access to archives, meetings etc.)
- ▷ Tips and strategies for communications
- ▷ Protocols and procedures for municipal decision-making: how to make submissions

- Resources: organizations, ASOs, agencies and institutes working to support enhanced arts and culture in rural and northern communities

## Digital Directions

In conversations with each region, we discussed digital platforms and shared services as potential tools that arts organizations could use in order to collaborate or develop support structures, given various infrastructure, human resource, advocacy and digital resource gaps. Not all rural and northern arts organizations, however, benefit from the same digital strategies. Organizations that are fairly near to urban centers, or that are situated close to or within communities that have connections with other clusters of nearby communities (e.g. Vancouver Island), or have access to other sector institutions, such as technological or educational institutions, may be able to establish digital collaborations and partnerships relatively easily, and these could develop and evolve over time, as technology and infrastructures improve<sup>11</sup>.

Vancouver Island's [Digital Hub, piloted by Creative Coast](#), is a good example of enabling access to digital practices through a constellation approach ("little tech hubs throughout the region, especially in rural and northern areas"), anticipating future adaption to digital-next technologies as beneficial for the island arts sector to communicate and market their work to multiple communities and stakeholders:

Artists are storytellers, sharing perspectives and ideas through their creations. Digital tools play a vital role in getting these stories out into the world. But not everyone's stories are being heard because many creative people on Vancouver Island have limited access to technology. We think one solution is to build little tech hubs throughout the region, especially in rural and northern areas. The Central Island Digital Creation Hub is a pilot project to test this concept. The hub offers one-to-one and small-group sessions for creatives who want to learn or grow their tech skills. With the support of a digital coach, you can use the equipment to create all sorts of content, including podcasts, videos, blogs, and books, as well as take photographs of your artwork. (Creative Coast)

Other BC based initiatives were also mentioned, such as Arts BC's Digital Literacy program (2019) which collaborates with different organizations to assess and develop programming to support data literacy and data empowerment. This is a multi-year project in three phases. The first phase was conducted in 2019 in partnership with Nordicity, [DigitArts](#). It focused on a needs assessment through community consultation with local community artists and cultural workers to better understand the challenges and opportunities of digital transformation in the arts and culture sector. They found that 46% of artists use digital tools for collaboration, but 81% of organizations do not have a digital strategy; this finding shows a significant contrast in adoption of digital use by artists and offering of digital organizations to be significant. Further analysis revealed:

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<sup>11</sup> The importance and influence of 'clusters' on digital strategies, arts production, exhibition and other cultural activities was highlighted in *Circulations: Navigating the Digital in Northern Ontario* (MANO, 2022).

- ▷ Majority of organizations cite a lack of funding while remaining largely unaware of free tools (many of which can save time and free up staff capacity)
- ▷ Most organizations are not ready for a comprehensive digital strategy, but they are ready to learn about different digital tools and how they can help with planning
- ▷ Most organizations struggle with getting board-level buy-in for the importance of digital  
**(ArtsBCDigistArts/Nordicity 11)**

Arts BC is currently in its second phase, [Thrive Digital](#). Its aim is to develop learning opportunities through workshops, peer learning groups and other methods and increase familiarity among the members of the arts community with digital methods. It encompasses strategic consideration regarding how digital tools are used in the everyday context of work and creativity. In addition, at the sector level, digital understanding and familiarity can assist with audience engagement, marketing, content development, collaboration and fundraising.

In addition, in 2019 the [Canadian Association for the Performing Arts](#) (CAPACOA), created the [Linked Digital Future](#) initiative with a regional coaching program and digital literacy service through the Atlantic Presenters Association (PE), Mass Culture (ON) and the BC Alliance for Arts + Culture (BC).

These digital strategies, offering both digital skills development (synchronous and asynchronous coaching and learning) and access to digital infrastructure, demonstrate the creative and networked approaches that are helpful for arts organizations in rural and northern communities. The strategies respond to the realities of geography, community size and organizational capacity and inform the proposed collaboration between the four regions that emerged through this research. Essentially, the strategy engages a networked approach that creates the conditions for amplifying the profiles of each regional organization, and then assesses the impact of this amplification. (To see the proposed inter-regional cluster strategy see this section here - current page 69.) An important step in the advancement and development of the proposed strategy is a review of existing and developing platforms, along with conversations with other organizations to determine if an existing platform could be scaffolded or expanded. This would help build collaboration, capacity and impact. It would also reduce repetition of services. Some platforms might be discipline or region specific, or have limited funding that does not allow for expansion, but organizations, especially when already stretched capacity-wise, do need to explore collaborations.

Geography, connectivity and capacity affect digital adoption; it is important to consider how rural/remote communities might share, apply and develop digital technologies. The needs of rural and northern arts organizations should be evaluated based on the realities and contexts of those communities and regions; rural and northern communities work differently than that of communities in urban and/or suburban spaces; and there is a great deal of unevenness in the regions from one community to another, even within close distances.

Some regions of Canada have historically had greater investment in building telecommunications infrastructure for urban and rural regions, but not all regions or communities are connected equally across

rural/remote regions, let alone in comparison to urban and suburban settings. Distance and access are major factors. As a result, the ability to adopt the same digital practices may not be possible in many rural and northern regions; there may be an unwillingness to adopt certain practices because they are inefficient as a result of a lack of infrastructure. For instance, Dokis First Nation in Ontario has barely functional bandwidth despite being, geographically, only 50 km across Lake Nipissing from North Bay, a small northeastern Ontario city with good internet infrastructure. Although there is interest in adopting digital programs for the local Dokis museum and to support local artists and crafts workers, the infrastructure doesn't support online strategies. Some organizations may create smaller networks of digital sharing – these may increase or the platforms improve as better infrastructures are implemented.

Understanding which rural and northern communities have strong infrastructure and technological support, and how arts sector organizations and creative industries are using those resources is important when assessing the current and future digital and other needs of the sector. For rural and northern regions, funding programs should invest significant funds toward multi-year projects and programs for both digital strategies and for innovation so that organizations have an opportunity to test already proven shared services or other digital components (depending on the realities of their region) or explore adapting models that are realistic for the community. Hybrid approaches need to be supported to allow for both on the ground and virtual strategies. Funders should also offer opportunities for phased projects with reasonable timelines for research, stakeholder involvement, pilots, collaboration and reporting. In rural communities, as this report identifies, staffing capacity does not match granting timelines; if organizations are building relationships between communities or within communities to develop a shared digital service project, there needs to be understanding and accommodation from funders regarding the fact that organizations often have multi-community responsibilities and minimal full time staff or part time staff for their own organizational needs – in essence, they need funded time to establish the conditions and relationships in order to implement digital strategies. In addition, funding needs to address operational costs and provide consistent funding for staffing and training costs.

In BC, one of the respondents noted that there is an active dynamic that occurs across sectors and communities:

Conversant: Creative processes occur through networks and flows of people and information between urban and rural areas, at regional, inter-regional and inter-community levels, and consist of scattered networks and nodes, hubs and incubators.

However, it was also noted that data empowerment and understanding was of concern; that data literacy is a key element of digital strategies and collaborations: what is data being used for and what can data explain in a beneficial way? As the conversant noted, building new digital platforms should come second to whether “the ones already in process could be modified (huge cost and time savings).”

The regular operations of arts organizations within rural and Northern regions have multi-dimensional ties to community and economic development that urban arts organizations do not. In conversation, participants

acknowledged the inequity between funding, project development and reporting expectations of funders and the realities of how rural organizations play multiple roles, develop relationships to share resources, gain and share knowledge and develop efficiencies amidst significant human resource and funding scarcity.

Our survey and conversations provided some insights regarding whether digital sharing or collaboration is already occurring or had changed; the types of digital initiatives that organizations were developing, promoting, or advocating; the platforms and applications that were of interest or a future possibility; the inclusion of other sectors; how organizations might already be using digital technology to support artists and art organizations; and what benefits they were seeing or anticipating.

As a way to navigate funding and capacity gaps, as well as share resources, one organization sought funding for a shared services project:

One of the main things that we learned was that everyone has to learn [and be experts in] everything. There are so many things, so many competencies, it's overwhelming. Our current project, that we've gotten funding for, is shared services... instead of doing all this stuff [to fulfill the project objectives] and curate art, and figure out child-care in your community, etc...we're doing research and design this year, and then we have funding to do a subsidized pilot next year. We have to build something sustainable. This is a provincial scale – organizations and individual artists, but there are other complementary projects happening and other things we could work on together.

Modifying or adopting digital platforms that are available is an efficient way for rural and northern organizations to assist with the administration, financial and training components of their organizations. Each region's arts organization sector has differences that affect the scale at which digital platforms can be adopted and shared between organizations. Organizations in BC, Manitoba, Newfoundland, and Ontario identified the same forms of digital supports for artists (out of a total of 16 options): digital promotion of artists and events; digital exhibiting and presenting platforms for artists; and business/arts and other partnerships for projects and resource sharing.

- ▷ 60% and 58% of respondent organizations, respectively, provide digital promotion of artists and events (e.g. artist map, online sales) and digital exhibiting/presenting platforms (e.g. online shows, artist talks, performances) for artists.
- ▷ 30% of organizations provide virtual mentorship and training (curatorial training, artistic/career training) and business, arts and other organizational partnerships/ affiliations/resource sharing for artists.

In terms of services offered to organizations, when looking at the four regions combined, the top three supports were the same as the supports to artists: digital promotion of artists and events, digital exhibiting and business, arts and other organizational partnerships/affiliations for projects and/or resource sharing. However, each region had some slight variations:

- ▷ BC included policy advocacy: needs of the sector and accommodations that reflect ad hoc rural realities (33%);
- ▷ Ontario included virtual mentorship and training (44.4%) as well as business arts and other organizational partnerships, affiliations or resource sharing (66.7%);
- ▷ Manitoba supported digital promotion of artists (56%) and digital exhibiting (44% each), but 44% also provided no digital supports to organizations.
- ▷ Atlantic Canada's largest support was through business, arts and other organizational partnerships/affiliations and/or resource sharing (71.4%), digital exhibiting (57.1%) and, like BC, policy advocacy (57.1%).

In the conversations, each region spoke about digital platforms and how shared services could benefit the arts sector. Each region is making use of digital options to reduce administrative loads and repurpose types of information. In the Manitoba group, we discussed creating repositories of templates for common use among arts organizations, but to seek endorsement by professionals in the administration field to legitimize them further and ensure their usefulness. This would benefit members and encourage active uptake:

...the past year and a half, we created a Google Shared Members folder and we put reports and templates in there. We did an audience research project, we developed 17 survey templates and put them in there. I think a shared repository of templates is good. But, there's one thing if we all create our own templates and, for example, no one has a human resources degree, [but it's not ] reviewed and approved and stamped by an HR person, or you know [also] the gift shop policies — a stamp of approval by someone in legal would take those templates up to the next level of professionalism. The other question is that we can't track how our members actually use our Google shared folders. So, we don't know how user-friendly or beneficial it actually is. But if there's a platform that shares these resources nationally, whether there's also a mechanism where they can post questions or 'Hey I'm looking for this or advice on this' so that it goes beyond the province, because there's great work being done in other provinces.

In Newfoundland, the conversation focused on data literacy and determining which shared services can be the most effective for organizations. The costs of some of the services were prohibitive for small organizations, and the terms of use often changed as the service scaled up, preventing continued use by the organization as a result of cost or a downgrade of service:

Conversant 1: We're using these [shared services] every day, but we don't necessarily have the deep skills to use them effectively. How do we use what we already use?

Conversant 2: Our board has a FB group, and we try to communicate that way when we're not together. I would love to know how to use something like Notion or Trello or something like that, to have a task management thing where [you see] all the projects that are going on and someone can go to that project and see what the next step is. Some are expensive for a small group to use, and the complications of figuring out how to use them. The good thing about Slack is you have an ongoing

conversation, but now they've started having fewer things, you can't keep the conversation for as long if you're not a paid member.

Conversant 3: We don't have a Marketing and Communication Manager for our organization, and I think a lot of organizations don't. We use HeyOrca as a scheduler. We had a free subscription for several years, and now they're charging us, and it's very expensive: \$100.00/mo, and we can't function without it. It's such an invaluable tool because you can work collaboratively. Everyone on the team puts their stuff in the schedule according to their needs and you can see when everyone is doing it. It's helpful but hard to find free stand-ins for it. A perennial conversation for us with art organizations is bookkeeping capability and software. I know there is free stuff out there. We connect to organizations who need cheap help getting into Quickbooks but it's not free and often the actual charge is the ceiling. So free bookkeeping and receipting software would be great. A lot of ad hoc groups may become non-profits to have that solid foundation of financial administration.

Conversant 4: We have a lot of members and have to protect their data. Improving the communication, collaborations, digitally streamlining the processes, and running the websites are challenging and expensive, and social media is time consuming. I'm feeling it's heavy right now – what our digital needs are – and our reality is that the staff that we have, we don't have the skills...we don't know what a lot of this stuff means, we're artists. We know we need it, but we don't even know what it means when people bring it up in meetings.

Many formal ASOs and groups providing arts service noted that their capacity is stretched by needing to provide information and support to artists and organizations, and by the additional skills and capacity required for digital strategies like online exhibitions and webinars for artists. They felt that a toolkit would be helpful to provide consistency, build artist capacity, and reduce the time spent providing repeat information. These resources might be digital guidebooks, a database of templates gathered from various sources, and/or short videos and webinars. The added advantage of these shared tools, is the systems consistency that would be created between organizations, and, as one conversant said, “bind us all together”.

Conversant 1: During Covid, we did some online exhibitions. It was a tremendous amount of work. Anything that you want to do well is always a tremendous amount of work. But I think it was more work than the general audience might guess, in terms of lighting, capturing the art, cropping, and making sure that it was translating to the web appropriately to preserve the integrity of the artist's pieces. ...it would probably be more beneficial if that's a tool that the artist had in their toolkit. If they came prepared with a USB with photos, professional photographs, well prepped, a word doc that has been spell checked, and everything right so that you could insert the photo, copy and paste, if there is a blurb or title card, or whatever. Oftentimes, it is a lot of work on our end at our end, proofing and editing what we are given. For me, I think that's a toolkit that we should be giving our artists ... because I also know that a lot of our arts orgs are one person. It's just a matter of capacity and our mandate is to promote our artists and to help them sell pieces and to help them share their work. So I



feel digital is a huge component of that, but we don't have the capacity. ... I think if we can provide the artists with, perhaps, a template or a toolkit and say, "If you want a digital gallery, here is your toolkit to give us those pieces for us to present you online."

Conversant 2: There are definitely webinars that arts orgs have to offer over and over again to new artists, like how to write a grant, or how to take a photo of your artwork, how to write an artist statement. If we compile a list of those core essential skills and then we all collectively pool some money, get one excellent YouTube resource, create a playlist, and we never have to do those webinars again. It would save everyone lots of money and time.

Overall, the regional coordinators agreed that based on the impact of existing collaborations and within the context of ongoing needs, more attention to inter-organization, intra-community and cross regional collaboration could be fruitful.

Vancouver Island's Creative Coast is a collaboration of artists and arts organizations developing relationships with other sectors, such as economic development and tourism. Of the many projects that it has underway, digital equity and sharing (through digital training and the development of digital 'hubs') and cross-sectoral partnerships and funding are key components of fostering a creative ecosystem that embraces sector-wide collaboration and innovation. In 2021, Creative Coast:

...conducted an All-Islands Arts Impact Study and preliminary gap analysis which enriched our understanding that the creative sector could be playing a more significant role in the super-region's economic and social well-being...In 2022, we expanded our conversations to include tourism and economic development sectors, and began exploring opportunities for collaboration and integration. This pilot has emerged from these cross-sectoral conversations. This timely exercise will ensure creative sector inclusion in emerging super-regional economic development and tourism strategies.

They are launching a two year pilot to scale up Creative Coast's shared services model for filling support gaps after having tested it in different communities. Their [All Islands Arts Impact Study](#) identified population demographics (900,000), the creative density across communities (6% or 55,000 working artists), tourism strengths (global top 10 designation and associated creative tourism opportunities) and a balance of urban and rural communities (50:50). Their cross-sectoral partnerships and collaborations can develop opportunities for alternative and mixed forms of funding, in addition to municipal, provincial and federal funds and contribute to a shift in the perception of what constitutes 'arts' and what contributes to a creative economy.

Business and Arts NFLD (one of our four Regional Coordinators) acts as an economic development organization and an arts service organization. Like Creative Coast, it advocates for cross-sectoral partnerships, knowledge and training exchanges that enables arts organizations to access funding or resources. Business and Arts NL's mandate is to:



- ▷ Identify and foster alliances between the arts and community collaborators in the private, public, and social sectors
- ▷ Create and nurture a community that encourages creativity and innovation through collaboration with the arts
- ▷ Communicate the benefits of art/community collaborations
- ▷ Identify, foster and facilitate access to alternative sources of financial, human and community capital for the arts

Collaboration comes with challenges, particularly when there is competition for limited resources, such as volunteerism, sponsorships and granting. In small rural and northern communities, relationships are critical. One of the regional conversations outlined the realities of relationships in small communities: the fact of volunteer burnout (volunteers working with multiple organizations), organizational burnout, and the need for cross-sector acknowledgement and integration. Collaboration within and between regions may expand as digital platforms and shared resources become more common as a way to compensate for lack and adopt new practices.

Conversant 1: I think from a network perspective, challenges with collaborations are between members for sure, as are communication methods. We struggled with [which platform]. Should we use a listserv? We tried to use a member Slack channel, but the uptake on it was just not great. It was a great concept, people could post a question, but if the other members aren't using it you don't get any response. How do you facilitate communication between members and build trust... There's a lot of trust in that central committee, there's a lot of trust now... there are still members that don't have that level of trust because they're protective: you're doing that, and I'm doing that, and we're so close together, I'm afraid you're going to steal my audience. We have to somehow [show] how collaboration will actually benefit them, and move away from fear-based decision making. The last thing I want to mention is we need to expand collaboration beyond just between arts organizations to collaborations between other sectors, like sports, tourism, recreation, so that the arts are embedded within everything within the community.

Conversant 2: I totally agree with what you said, on a lot of points in terms of trying to instill that 'community over competition' mindset. It's huge. In terms of community planning, we imported, formed, an Executive Director's network. Not all of us, but some of us, will post "Hey, heads up, here are some upcoming dates, or our fundraiser is this day!" so that there is no competition. There's room for all of us. Generally speaking, you're always going to get one or two who do not want to fit in that mold. I think there could stand to be some team-building type [professional development]. Really strong speaker presentations on that topic is a really good idea too.

Conversant 1: I agree with the competition aspect. In rural communities, part of the things standing in the way of collaboration is volunteers. Those good volunteers are already sitting on 3-6 committees. I was in a community meeting [in a small town] and every single person in that room is representing

three different groups. And [the town] is maybe 1500 people. People are already running in five different directions for all these groups they are passionate about. The generation that is coming behind us just wants to give you the money and walk away. They don't have the time or capacity, and it hasn't been built into them that volunteering is a benefit in something that is going to help your community grow better, grow more.

## Funder Strategies

Conversations in our circles recommended that funders, in particular the Canada Council for the Arts (CCA) given its prioritization on digital strategies, consider a few strategies to assist in meaningful, networked projects:

- ▶ Create a document outlining all funded sector and capacity building projects and make this document available via the website (short summary and link to the project) – this will help organizations know about resources and strategies and help juries make more informed decisions about proposed sector development projects.
- ▶ In the jurying process, assess whether large, regional or national ASOs have clear, meaningful and existing relationships with regional and local organizations; that they have defined a relevant and respectful process that includes meaningful input and direction from local and regional partners; and that if they are relying on local contacts and support, that the project and its budget include meaningful contributions for local partners and collaborators.
- ▶ Provide additional funds for projects that will include significant relationship building, collaboration and building on existing networks and strategies to reduce reproduction and competition.
- ▶ Consider creating longer-term capacity and sector development grants for regions where there are no ASOs, or there is little ASO reach by existing ASOs.

## Digital Strategies

The main concerns that each region expressed are summarized below. The four regions did not develop particular strategies to respond to all of these myriad and complex needs; their proposed strategies are a step toward addressing them. Future projects, advocacy and funding will be required to address the following needs and issues:

*Digital literacy:* expressed by all regions as a form of training that would assist with generational knowledge differences as well as organizational adoption of softwares, platforms and technologies in general. Each region has different priorities and a different focus in relation to strengthening digital capacity. While technology could help with reducing, or sharing, some of the tasks related to running an arts organization, the process to adopt platforms and maintain their use requires additional time that organizations that have limited staffing cannot afford.

*Digital funding:* needed for digital adoption and digital project phasing. Each region identified the adoption of digital methods as variable, especially as connectivity infrastructures are variable and organizations are chronically understaffed in small communities in rural and northern regions of Canada.

*Organizational digital needs assessing and platform sharing:* Our conversations with arts organizations highlighted the realities of burnout among staff, while trying to consider digital platforms, their learning curves and finding good platforms that can be maintained financially and organizationally. In terms of partnerships with other community organizations or institutions to assist with training or sharing staff for digital adoption, it was noted that in rural communities, municipalities don't necessarily adopt digital strategies because their resources are also slim. Platforms that assist with arts administration, or that can help with communications and marketing administration, are helpful. A missing piece is software for bookkeeping and financial administration and for project management and scheduling that arts organizations can afford. Finally, it was acknowledged that the ability to work with professionals in various fields (HR, Legal) to professionalize documents and materials would help with organizational administration.

*Digital contexts:* Understanding which rural and northern communities have strong infrastructure and technological support, and how arts sector organizations and creative industries are using those resources, is important when assessing the current and future digital needs of the sector. For rural and northern regions, funding programs should invest significant funds toward multi-year projects and programs for digital strategies and for innovation so that organizations have an opportunity to test already proven shared services or other digital components depending on the realities of their region, and to explore adaptations of strategies to meet context. Hybrid approaches need to be supported to allow for both on the ground and virtual strategies. Funders should also offer opportunities for phased projects with reasonable timelines for research, stakeholder involvement, pilots, collaboration and reporting. In rural communities, as this report identifies, staffing capacity does not match granting timelines; if organizations are building relationships between communities or within communities to develop a shared digital service project, there needs to be understanding and accommodation from funders regarding the fact that organizations often have multi-community responsibilities and minimal full time or part time staff for their own organizational needs. In essence, they need funded time to establish relationships in order to implement digital strategies. In addition, funding needs to address operational costs and provide consistent funding for staffing and training.

*Digital toolkits and repositories:*

- ▷ HR templates and guides: how to manage an interview, evaluation templates, progress reports, mentorship models
- ▷ Space use and rental agreements: fee schedules, examples of workshare agreements, gift shop policies
- ▷ Documentation of artwork
- ▷ Virtual and physical exhibitions: submission guidelines, submission portals, standard commissions and sales agreement templates, how to write an artist statement

- ▷ Virtual workshops: checklists and tips, shared virtual platforms, toolkits for workshop facilitators  
Please see this section for the cluster strategy
- ▷ Research & survey templates
- ▷ Inter-regional digital strategy: proposed by the four participating regions in this research project, the pilot aims to amplify, advocate, share resources and assess the impact of these strategies through a digital resource-sharing and clustering platform and a longitudinal study

## Data

Data access and its uses, the function and ownership of data, and protection of data concern all arts organizations in the sector. In its focus on rural communities, the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation (CRRF)'s report *State of Canada III: Bridging the Rural Data Gaps* notes that rural Canada is:

.... at a disadvantage with respect to the availability and access to data, as well as its analysis and mobilization. Their small size makes confidentiality issues challenging, their distance from larger centres makes data collection more expensive, and their lower financial and analysis capacity creates barriers to data analysis and use. As a result, the data gaps and deficits they face are more detrimental to their effective development than found in most urban places. (CRRF 6)

Most of the focus of our research regarding digital methods and uses was related to how organizations are using digital platforms and software to develop and/or improve organizational capacity, the adoption of shared digital practices, best practices and initiatives and the interest among organizations for the types of shared services that would be effective at addressing capacity issues. While data is important, especially in relation to data privacies, collection and advocacy, in-depth research was beyond the scope of this project. However, the CRRF offered several recommendations, each of which is condensed in the data strategies below this section.

A key finding in both our survey and our conversations was that organizations do not have the resources or time to adequately advocate for themselves or the sector regarding data protection and collection. Yet, funders, partners, and stakeholders use data to assess the organization's effectiveness within the community without adequately understanding the difficulties small, rural and northern organizations have in gathering their own data (quantitative and qualitative) and presenting it so that it makes an impact, or accessing the data that they need from Statistics Canada, funding agencies (provincial and federal) and municipalities. This was supported by our discussions in BC:

Conversant 1: People are coming to me to say they are having to prove to the municipality the value of art and not having the tools to do so; they're looking for tools and data to show the municipality what the value is....they're one person in the whole thing [organization] fighting and having to prove value. Creative BC got money and partnered with Royal Roads for MA and PhD [Masters and Doctorate] students to come into our festival. They did an economic and creative cultural impact study. We have had leverage from that to show that data is real.

Conversant 2: Something important is that a lot of the data that exists, even though extracted from the community, doesn't tend to be representative outside of cities. I had a conversation with StatsCan about extractive processes and yet they [rural arts organizations] are not getting anything out of it to take to municipalities. So, if [a funder, agency or organization] is looking for change, simply making that data available to them could help make that shift there.

Advocacy requires both qualitative and quantitative data. An advocacy 'toolkit' for municipalities is a way for organizations to tell their stories — their successes, activities, collaborations, and requirements — to municipalities and other funders. At the municipal level, regular meetings with municipal council or committees would help with relationship building, as well as show municipalities the amount of in-kind, volunteer and injected funds that the art sector provides to municipalities, as well as, quantified and qualified, the benefits to the community of the arts sector. This was discussed as part of the Ontario conversation:

The municipal involvement with these arts organizations and what is expected from the local is not really commonly understood. Multiple other organizations, especially across the country, expect the local involvement somehow to make something happen. The idea is that provincial and federal funders should just be activating without the local investment doesn't really make sense. From the CCA, they are concerned about the volume of core clients [organizations receiving operating funding] — there's over 1400 federal core clients at CCA and that's a lot to them... Canada has the highest per capita amounts of core clients, mostly because other places in the world say that you have to build something for yourself before they'd come in and get involved... they'd say we want this done, not just the art itself, but what it will do for the community. I feel that that was never really understood at the local level for some places, they don't have a clear understanding of what this is supposed to do. I'd really love it if municipalities or communities would say, well we'd love to fund the arts if they did this, if they asked us to do anything [something specific] there'd be more creative responses.

The point was made that, as an important funder for organizations in small rural and northern communities, municipalities should support organizational access to data; and, importantly, all funders, at all levels, should enable organizations to access the data collected by these bodies in relation to their communities and sector. As suggested by this project's Ontario Regional Coordinator, a municipal handbook would be helpful: it could combine stories and data to demonstrate to municipal councils and staff the activities of the local arts sector, as well as the investment and benefit to communities of engaging the arts and funding them.

Participants were clear that the sharing of data by the funders would enable a deeper examination of disproportionate funding distribution (such as to urban centres), and also demonstrate that the number of activities organized and promoted by arts organizations in rural and northern regions is vastly underestimated by current forms of data collection in the arts sector. Business and Arts NFLD suggested a five point advocacy platform, with clearly defined metrics for demonstrating the benefits and effects of a healthy arts sector, an idea supported by all the Regional Coordinators.

## Data Strategies

Broader strategies and needs as identified in the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation's report, *State of Canada III: Bridging the Rural Data Gaps*:

- ▷ Build a better understanding of the importance and practical application of data in rural places
  - ▶ Engage communities with data collection, draw links to community needs and aspirations, and demonstrate how a better understanding, built on evidence, can help foster novel solutions. This also includes learning how to anticipate needs and asking the right questions, developing metrics, and collecting data to respond to these questions. In a world clouded by questions that can be manipulated to promote almost any answer, there must be a continuous commitment to critical analysis.
- ▷ Ensure consistent, longitudinal qualitative and quantitative data are collected and used
  - ▶ No amount of quantitative assessment is sufficient to understand a whole problem or to develop an effective solution. The CRRF book highlights how non-statistical information is equally important for decision-making about rural places, as well as for planning and policy development. While qualitative data is often recognized as important, it is most often collected in single, one-off projects, making it challenging to track or compare over time. There are opportunities for the systematic collection of qualitative data to happen in different ways and at multiple levels. This includes everything from practitioners collecting anecdotes from local stakeholders to provincial, territorial, or federal-scale efforts to collect qualitative data related to quality of life or community resilience over time in a consistent manner. Both private and public funds are necessary to make these initiatives possible, as well as a heightened respect for qualitative research and data.
- ▷ Support local efforts and capacity-building
  - ▶ Support from upper levels of government is needed to help rural communities develop capacity, including human capacity to identify, access, and analyze existing sources of data, as well as the capacity for communities to collect their own data. Resources, in the form of tools, technical assistance and supports are critical, as are financial resources.
- ▷ Show rural data in regional, provincial, territorial and federal data.
  - ▶ This challenge requires the disaggregation of national, provincial and territorial data to allow practitioners and scholars to see how important trends are reflected in rural and northern places. Where possible, these rural data sets should be publicly accessible and supported. (CRRF 7)

## Organizational Data Strategies:

*Shared services:* These could be digital, but could also be hybrid administrative and policy instruments for saving and sharing resources and developing relationships. These would include ethical partnerships to balance out differential power relationships. For northern and rural communities these networked inter-community, inter-organizational, cross-regional and mixed sector collaborations can effectively respond to the geographical, demographic and organizational contexts of northern and rural regions.

*Advocacy toolkit:* Advocacy requires both qualitative and quantitative data. An advocacy 'toolkit' for working with municipalities is a way for organizations to tell their stories — their successes, activities, collaborations and requirements — to municipalities and other funders. The toolkit could include templates for surveys, links and analysis of existing data and examples of strong data storytelling.

*Relationship building:* At the municipal level, regular meetings with municipal council or committees can help with relationship building, as well as show municipalities the amount of in-kind, volunteer and injected funds that the art sector provides to municipalities, as well as, quantified and qualified, the benefits to the community of the arts sector. Digital strategies to engage municipalities cannot be effective without strong local on the ground relationships with municipalities.

## Data Recommendations

The findings from our research support a combination of funding and advocacy to enable arts organizations and other rural, northern and remote institutions in Canada to adopt good organizational data practices as well as have access to, and control, data that is collected. The strategies below align with recommendations from the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation, such as the need for longitudinal research, contextual data and capacity building.

Gathering data of value to the regions would require substantial work with long term commitment, capacity and funding to identify and analyze relevant statistical, funding, and other research databases and to develop, implement and maintain longitudinal impact studies. It would require organizations to

- ▷ Research who accesses creative sector funding (provincial, federal, municipal foundations, grantors, agencies) and demonstrate uneven levels and gaps in funding
- ▷ Demonstrate how much the creative sector draws into the community as a way to tell funders about the organization's impacts, but also as a comparative metric to other organizations or small metrics
- ▷ Capture demographics to find out who is engaged in the creative sector as an artist/creator, with the aim to capture not only full-time/part-time demographics, but also those who have more fluid work 'identities' and a range of ways to earn income
- ▷ Develop ways of capturing stories about how the arts sector works in rural and northern communities. Also demonstrate how other sectors use the arts to advertise and market their own sectors, but do not attribute the 'draw' to the creative sectors



- ▷ Develop and use metrics that measure not only direct participation in the arts, and audience/participant numbers, but also less tangible impacts and spin off from cultural activities
- ▷ Develop longitudinal research that demonstrates long term impact on people/participants, communities, local economies and other elements

## **Arts Funder Data Recommendations**

### ***Public Data Collection, Access and Sharing***

- ▷ Canada Council for the Arts, and any provincial funders that require Canadian Arts Database (CADAC) reporting by operating funded organizations, might consider working with CADAC on a pilot project to create relevant data for rural and northern arts organizations
- ▷ Provincial and federal funders (ie: CCA) gather data about funded organizations, and while the data is technically public, most small organizations do not have the capacity (human, skilled or financial resources) to generate relevant data. As most funders have data analysts on staff, consider a pilot project to provide relevant community level data for small communities and under-resourced arts organizations
- ▷ Reinstate and/or create small, easily accessible grants, and longer term strategic grants (that don't count within the current allowable number of grants), to support skills and capacity development in the areas of data generation, analysis and distribution, data sharing (regionally, provincially, nationally) and data and impact storytelling
- ▷ Advocate for rural data and encourage data sharing from funders and/or other arts organizations to reduce the workload for small arts organizations when the data is already in existence



## Strategy: Inter-Regional Storytelling Collaboration Pilot Project

Conversant 1: Doing a pilot with even just the others around the table [would be helpful]. Just nailing those five metrics, [let's say] we're going to measure these five things, just for this year. The collective meets – is this working? Maybe it's about all of us collecting two stories for the region. Maybe it's a conference. Just to keep it simple. Like Mass Culture sort of did, so we come together, we talk about it, talk about the info, we get partners to start collecting the five metrics, and we start building another set of case studies to connect with later. We're building it, but keeping the connections with those regions. We all want something that will solve so many problems, but then we fall into the Arts Pond area...we need something simple that can be impactful that can capture the right data to tell the stories we need. In that we would build the data for our regions that is relative that speaks to our communities. We don't have the capacity. It's a way we can move forward in little bits so that we can move forward.

In addition to specific strategies integrated elsewhere in this report, the four Regional Coordinators determined there were two important interlinking strategies that could have a significant impact by extending their capacity, increasing and communicating their presence in their communities and building more consistent storytelling. They proposed a pilot project that would see the four regions continue to collaborate over a number of years.

The focus of their collaboration would be on two interlinked strategies:

- ▶ The development of a digital platform designed to be an active portal. It would need to be kept current and focus on rural and northern contexts, so that it maintains relevancy over time. The platform would meet the needs of storytelling, advocacy, and data sharing that were identified in this report.
- ▶ The development of longitudinal study (qualitative and quantitative analysis) to interlink with the digital platform. It would assess the impact of advocacy, data sharing and storytelling. We know that other sectors (like sports) have strong visibility and storytelling components; these contribute to their consistent investments. The Regional Coordinator's identified a primary research question: *What impact would strong and consistent storytelling about the successes, impacts, and needs of the arts in rural and northern communities have on the support of ASOs in northern and rural communities?*

The project would unfold in three specific phases, each of which would require targeted funding from one or more federal and provincial funders.

### Longitudinal Study

- ▶ Goal: understand the impact of storytelling, advocacy and the creation of a digital database on organizational capacity and municipal relationships (in terms of strong relationships, funding and other supports).

- ▷ Data: establish 4 or 5 metrics to be used in all four regions, and tracked over 3 years against an established baseline.
- ▷ Stories: collect two or three stories per region to amplify impact.
- ▷ Scale: focus on the four regional ASOs involved in this project plus 1 or 2 additional organizations from each region (for a total of up to 8 organizations), so that dedicated, focused storytelling can be accomplished realistically over several years.

## Platform

- ▷ Stories: profiles of the partnering organizations and their members/communities, projects and challenges.
- ▷ Advocacy: data sharing about rural and northern arts sector impact and needs.
- ▷ Data: a repository of raw and analyzed data with controls and permissions for sharing; this would be associated with the dissemination/storytelling of data as it emerges through the associated longitudinal study.
- ▷ Webinars: a playlist on a range of topics from how to write an artist statement to how to prepare a financial statement or use project management software – webinars might be linked from other organizations and platforms and be those created by the project partners.
- ▷ Organizational and artist tool kits: templates, guides and how to's, endorsed by professionals in the arts administration, training and legal fields to ensure usefulness and encourage active use.
  - ▶ Organizational: HR policies, evaluation templates, gift shop policies, space use and rental policies, commission templates, partnership agreements, sample budgets, strategic planning tips, advocacy toolkits, project management strategies
  - ▶ Artists: workshop delivery tips and checklists, artist statements, how to document artwork, artwork submission policies and steps, grant writing tips and strategies
- ▷ Resources: Links to other capacity and sector building projects, strategies and organizations, Municipal guidebooks, examples of Municipal/community securities, foundations and other supports.
- ▷ Active Q+A: The regions noted they'd be interested in some form of live chat or live linking for people looking for particular resources and links within and outside of the platform.

## Development and Funding Phases

The following phased approach was proposed as a project that aims to support the development of digital strategies (listed above), collaboration and capacity. If adopted, it should be integrated into a phased funding strategy:

1. ***Project development and relationship building: (1-2 years)***
  - ▷ Time is essential for the four regions to continue discussions, develop collaborative practices, and establish the basis for project governance and collective decision-making.
  - ▷ Governance will establish a collaborative decision making structure.

- ▷ Research is required to determine the most appropriate platforms. This includes understanding that parts of a platform may suit better than others and that data sharing and equity will also be a focus. Access and affordability and sense are also necessary, depending on the capacity of the organization.
- ▷ Communication with colleagues in other regional, provincial and national organizations will be important for exploring possible relationships for platform development and maintenance.
- ▷ Administration will be discussed among the pilot organizations; one organization will be chosen to act as the lead coordinator for the first phase of the project.
- ▷ Data is necessary to capture and evaluate the impact of the new platform on a) organizational capacity, and b) municipal relationships and public profile by establishing a baseline and metrics to track change over time. A data and/or evaluation specialist will be required to design a strategy for capturing and evaluating the platform and its impacts.
- ▷ Professional development for organizational leads will generate partnership development, team building, storytelling, and assist with organizational learning.
- ▷ Platform design thinking will have a phased approach as the regions conduct research and discuss what is needed, or establish directions for the platform such as: what is it for? Who will benefit? Can it be adapted for future applications?
- ▷ Capacity to manage the project may be enabled by a phased approach and time to build trust among community and economic development agencies.

## 2. **Platform development & launch:** (3 years)

- ▷ Administration: one of the pilot organizations must be supported to act as the lead coordinator for phase one
- ▷ Design and Direction: work with professional storyteller/communications specialist to establish goals, strategies and audiences to build community and municipal awareness of the impact, successes and needs of the arts communities of each of the project partners.
- ▷ Platform design: work with a professional site builder to create new, or adapt/scaffold an existing platform to accommodate the desired design and functionality
- ▷ Training: Training for project members about storytelling, data collection, interpretation and dissemination
- ▷ Content creation/storytelling: hire a professional writer to create profiles of the organizations, their projects, members, successes and needs and communicate the implications of various data. Other writing would include development of the municipal guides, artist packages and other tools identified as strategies elsewhere in the report. Work with experts, coaches and other specialists in arts administration and training to review and give the 'stamp of approval' on templates and tools so that they are both highly relevant and encourage active use.
- ▷ Data/ongoing evaluation: Work with a data specialist to establish baseline and then track impact of the project over time on a) municipal relationships, and b) organizational capacity.

- ▶ Platform and project costs: fees for building or adapting a platform; design costs for development of guides, web pages and marketing materials to promote the content to members, communities, Municipalities etc; marketing costs

### 3. *Long-term management, maintenance & content generation: (2+ years)*

- ▶ Administrative capacity: funding and capacity is required for an organization to continue to manage the platform and coordinate with project partners.
- ▶ Data/evaluation: assessment/evaluation of project impact; analysis and data sharing.
- ▶ Platform and project costs: fees for hosting the platform (software, hardware, IT)
- ▶ Content creation/storytelling: new profiles of the organizations, their projects, members, successes and needs.
- ▶ Ongoing capacity and directions: should be based on the data and project evaluation and lead to a review of scale and associated strategies. This may develop into a possible expansion of regions or a focus that supports a particular region. New funding strategies should be considered to ensure the project, and its impact, can continue.

## **Funding and Capacity**

This work cannot be done without capacity. It was agreed that the four regions would co-apply for funding to develop the pilot. The organization with the least need for grants from the CCA for its regular programming would act as lead applicant<sup>12</sup>. Each region would apply, where possible, for funding from their municipal and/or regional funders to support the project. The group discussed the importance of reaching out to non-arts agencies for support and/or funds, such as economic development funds.

We regularly heard comments regarding the duplication of research and projects throughout Canada and in many regions. This problems stems from a number of issues: first, a dire need for capacity building and, tied to that need, the lack of relevant data which has led many organizations to identify strategies to address these gaps; second, collaboration, research and a phased strategic approach requires capacity, existing relationships and an environment of collaboration which, unfortunately, has been challenged by the structures and (often competitive) requirements of granting programs.

If organizations are allowed only two or three grants per year by a particular funder, then they are not in a position to risk their core programming focus to apply for grants to build the sector where there aren't mandated ASOs doing this work. Finally, organizations apply for grants without knowing if existing and/or similar projects have already been funded. It has also been the case where larger organizations (provincial and federal) see the opportunity and are successfully funded, but may not have the deep regional relationships, process and context that will ensure the project has 'legs'.

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<sup>12</sup> The creation of a collective to circumvent grant limitations was discussed, but the added burden of creating a new entity was not favourable to the group. They agreed that over time, the pilot might extend to other regions or potentially amalgamate with an existing organization, making a new entity unnecessary.

## *Ad hoc Collectives*

We included ad hoc groups and collectives within our research framework because they represent an organizational grouping that are typically underrepresented both in research and various forms of data collection. Yet, ad hoc groups or collectives are significant to the functioning of the arts sector. Ad hoc groups engage in a range of arts activities including direct arts creation with its members/community, and/or they can function as a representative entity on behalf of artists or other arts groups by providing services similar to ASOs. Organizationally, their unincorporated status enables ad hoc groups or collectives to be extremely fluid and responsive to their communities and contexts. Yet, their often highly underfunded status renders them more vulnerable to administrative and organizational precarity because they struggle with (sustained) access to funds to maintain programs. It can be difficult to track the ongoing operations of ad hoc groups and collectives because of their lack of capacity to engage in research projects and surveys and the lack of priority in the arts sector that is placed on researching rural communities and the informal sector. However, our survey results and conversations helped identify the precarity of ad hoc groups and their use of “nesting” strategies with an established ASO for project-specific activities and, in some cases, physical resources and staffing.

77% of our survey identified as non-profit, and just under 7% identified as an ad hoc collective. Nesting with another organization lessens an ad hoc's financial and staffing burdens and still enables it to work within the arts sector. In one of our conversation groups, ad hoc collectives were referred to as ‘nimble’ organizations. It was noted that they don't tend to fit one funding stream because their functions intermingle with other organizations. In this context, the extent of nesting as a funding/resource mechanism is important. 30% of our respondents nest with other organizations – it is relational funding that demonstrates collaboration and cooperation that assists with overall arts sector capacity. It can be long-term and adjustable to circumstance.

Ad hoc collectives are limited by a lack of representative funding options; undergoing incorporation may not be possible given member interest, energy and the demographic that they serve. Many ad hoc collectives resist the limiting boundaries and structures required of formally incorporated structures, preferring to operate with governance and operating structures that are responsive to cultural, social, artistic, community, and administrative contexts. Formal incorporation opens doors to funding – both project and operating funding by federal and provincial arts funders – but they find that the strictures of ‘professionalization’ aren't aligned with the ethos and practices of the work they do in communities and the people they work with. Many ad hoc groups are thinking deeply about how to ‘professionalize’ in ways that align with their values, and are exploring whether there are non-normative structures that are both possible and would be recognized by funding agencies.

Conversant 1: Ad hoc structures are a bit more nimble because they don't have that structure [non-profit structure], so their mandates can shift, their programming can shift a bit, and they can kind of fold and come back and fold and come back, whereas non-profits are different. So it's interesting that a lot of folks don't have a bunch of collectives and ad hocs that they know of..it's just very

different than, like, say Ontario where I know so many ad hoc groups and collectives that are functioning. Do you think there is a reason why it could be different in your regions where there's just, you know, not a lot of groups functioning, or do you think they are under the radar where you just don't see them?

Conversant 2: I just thought of one. I think I didn't digest and give this enough thought, and now I think there's a lot more that I'm just not realizing....it's a choral movement that used to be a thing. They're trying to do a big global festival but they need a proponent to host the money, do all the administration, and they're working with us, potentially. So they're a collective of choral groups and people at the university, and that's the one that I realized. They came to us for that support to say, you've got insurance, you've got a board, admin...

Conversant 1: You're going to wrack your brain and tomorrow you'll go "I know, like, 20." But what sort of supports do you think those folks would need? Having someone to offset those initial capacities of insurance, bookkeeping, admin, or having brick and mortar space that would allow those sort of collective ad hoc groups flourish and foster the creative sector? Or is it digital needs?

In our conversation with groups in Atlantic Canada, 'ad hoc' had some flexibility to its definition because in some instances, although the group might be incorporated, have a non-profit board structure in place, and were skilled at delivering creative programming, they lack the organizational and arts business skills to run a formal organization. In these cases, the board structure is more like a prop, in a way, because they don't have a strategic plan or visioning plan — they just don't have capacity or interest. In some cases a group works with an ASO to cover them through their ASO insurance, to fulfill board functions and to provide administrative support.

Despite the prevalence or importance of ad hoc entities historically, information regarding ad hoc groups and their role within the art sector is difficult to find, possibly because of inconsistent networks (ASO supports), longevity of the ad hoc collective, lack of capacity and resources and volunteer and coordinator burnout issues. Most notably, there is a clear lack of direct data collection — ad hocs are ineligible for operating funding from the Canada Council for the Arts (and from provincial funders), and therefore not required to provide annual statistical information. As a result of a perceived lack of organizational status, they are often overlooked by researchers.

In a data focused climate, where it's increasingly necessary to demonstrate impact to funders, municipalities and communities via quantitative data, ad hoc groups fall through the cracks. Focused research from funders regarding rural, northern and remote ad hoc groups and collectives, their instability within the sector, and the ways they navigate instability and provide services to artists and communities is needed. This would help the arts sector and potential collaborators to understand the depth of what they offer in terms of artistic creation: their community engagement, any volunteerism within the arts sector, how resources are shared, and any localized projects. Understanding their needs would encourage strategies to assist them.

In our conversation with the Regional Coordinators, we asked for some perspective and context regarding ad hoc groups, their operational status, how the pandemic affected their abilities to support artists, and if they have funding or are able to nest with other ASOs. The ad hoc groups that do exist are mainly volunteer-driven and most commonly driven by artists and artist collectives. Another participant in this conversation noted that during the pandemic, an ad hoc organization did nest with a member ASO, but the support of the ad hoc group, and other unincorporated, volunteer run groups in the community, was a strain both financially and organizationally on the ASO because the ad hoc groups want to use the resources for free and do not offer to help (with exhibits or volunteer events) as a way of collaborating or exchanging resources.

The Manitoba group noted that funding in the province hasn't changed for over thirty years and organizations or small groups struggle to continue in the sector without adequate funding, staffing or volunteers, and resources such as office space.

We're status quo. I know in my time, in the three years, our operating funding hasn't changed from our levels of government. We get funding from three levels of government: municipal, provincial, and federal. It hasn't increased or decreased.

This static level of funding, often inadequate to sustain existing programs, makes it difficult for organizations to support emerging or established ad hoc groups and collectives. Yet, many organizations provide arts service functions where there aren't formal ASOs or municipal support for cultural sector development (for instance, a gallery with a mission to curate and present exhibitions, might be the nest and administrative support for an ad hoc community group); these added responsibilities stretch organizations who are often struggling to meet their own missions, given cross the board under-funding and capacity issues.

The role of smaller ASO's (perhaps ad hoc collectives are included in this category) to help develop cooperation and collaborative networks is discussed in "Strategies for Social Engagement: Arts-service Organizations as Organizational Intermediaries":<sup>13</sup>

...some smaller ASOs have been able to share resources with other community organizations through collaborative relationships, such as working in shared offices or sharing office administrative or other nonspecific staff, and thereby stretch their already stretched-thin budgets. Almost all of the ASOs interviewed and surveyed reported that they collaborate with other ASOs or other organizations in some way. While these collaborations can present their own challenges ... they can also bring to light the challenges faced by an underfunded and under-resourced sector. (Campbell, Evans, Wowk, 9)

Ad hoc collectives and other informal arts groups are important to the arts ecosystem because they operate within the social, cultural and economic frameworks of rural communities within regions, but can represent regions or provinces. Of our survey, 2 respondents, both Ontario based, identified as an ad hoc collective or group. One is a regional arts organization, and the other a provincial arts organization.

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<sup>13</sup> Paper from research conducted in partnership with Mass Culture.



- ▷ Less than 25% of the work of these two ad hoc groups supports other arts organizations;
- ▷ One supports underserved communities (Indigenous, BPOC, LGBTQIA2+, Disabled) 75%-100% of the time; the other between 50% and 75%
- ▷ Each has been operating 2-3 years (just pre-CV), and rely on a single funder: a provincial funder for one (1 yr to date), and the other nests/resource shares with another organization and receives some funding from an external foundation (2-3 years)
- ▷ One has one paid staff, the other no paid staff but a volunteer

<p><b>Which of the following non-digital supports does your organization offer artists in your region?</b></p>	<p>Grant guidance, feedback, reporting; exhibiting/presenting (e.g., shows, performances etc.);curatorial and art writing support (done remotely, but curatorial is site-based in the gallery via Facetime), providing in-kind professional documentation of artworks</p>	<p>Physical equipment access (e.g., computers, copiers, video equipment etc.);In-person networking and arts opportunities (e.g., forums, conferences, seminars, etc.);Language/translation/cultural supports;In-person training and mentorship (e.g., HR training, curatorial training, administrative training)</p>
<p><b>Which of the following digital supports does your organization offer artists in your region?</b></p>	<p>Digital promotion of artists and events (e.g., artist map, online sales etc.);Digital exhibiting/presenting platforms for artists (e.g., online shows, artist talks, performances etc.);Virtual mentorship and training (e.g., curatorial training, artistic/career development)</p>	<p>Arts programming opportunities and online resources</p>
<p><b>Which of the following non-digital supports does your organization offer arts organizations and other groups in your region?</b></p>	<p>None</p>	<p>Physical equipment access (e.g., computers, copiers, video equipment etc.);In-person training and mentorship (e.g., HR training, curatorial training, administrative training);via supplementing existing partner spaces and programming</p>
<p><b>Which of the following digital supports does your organization offer arts organizations and other groups in your region?</b></p>	<p>None</p>	<p>Business, arts, and other organizational partnerships/affiliations for projects and/or resource sharing</p>
<p><b>What type of resource sharing and/or collaboration with another organization would help you fulfill your mandate?</b></p>	<p>Artist fees, shipping costs, exhibition touring, workshops</p>	<p>Administrative / Bookkeeping support</p>



<b>Which elements of a shared digital platform or collaboration would you recommend?</b>	Collaborative and/or cooperative model; record of supporting and building capacity; wish there were examples of what some of these options would be [not sure].	Established network; collaborative and/or cooperative model
<b>What impacts your ability to support artists and other arts organizations?</b>	Completely volunteer led! Have nearly no capacity to sustainably maintain operations, let alone apply to grants.	No stability in arts / poor funding. Require a full time job which disables me from properly investing into projects that should be full-time / long term

It is important to note that these two organizations are located in rural communities, but are representing a region and a province in Ontario. They have very limited staff for the work that they are doing on behalf of artists: they operate through onsite events as well as virtually and by using digital means to promote, exhibit and generally support artists. By putting artists first (their mandates), but operating on such a slim financial and administrative margin, they are always in a precarious position. If these two ad hoc organizations closed, there would be a negative effect on artist representation in Northern Ontario, on the reciprocity between artists and arts organizations who support them, and the audiences that engage with the art. Both organizations work with communities that are underserved in the Canadian cultural sector – artists who identify as belonging to Indigenous, BPOC, LGBTQIA2+ and/or Disabled communities.

While we don't have extensive enough data to be conclusive, these two examples, along with the knowledge of ASO representatives during our conversations, indicate that there may be an important and interesting relationship between the types of communities served and organizational structure. Normative structures, and typical definitions of 'established' and 'professional', may not be reflective of communities, cultural approaches to governance and/or diversity. If funding agencies, organizations and communities aim to be more responsive and inclusive by responding to calls for culturally-relevant approaches, indigenizing and decolonizing systems and greater inclusivity of diversity (BPOC, neuro-diversity, disability) then we need to look much more closely at ad hoc groups and cultural contexts for meaningful and relevant ways of organizing and engaging systems of support.

The BC Regional Coordinator noted that smaller organizations, like ad hoc groups, are doing things 'on the ground' and 're-creating things': "We need to be quiet and listen to what they're doing, and observe what they're doing. They're existing." She suggests that circumventing what isn't working for ad hocs (like regular granting streams) and accessing other resources, such as foundation money, may enable more flexibility and enable support for ad hoc organizations. "How do we help those ad hoc organizations access money or raise money in different ways?". The challenge is that many foundations, and municipal funds also typically require incorporation status, which means that incorporated arts organizations and municipalities need to consider acting as flow-through agencies for small ad hoc groups that provide important cultural activities but are unable to, or for a range of reasons (from cultural to capacity) choose to remain unincorporated.

In order to support ad hoc collectives, the Regional Coordinators noted that there's no benefit for ad hoc collectives to formalize — this would mean that they would be less flexible and have less access to other forms of funding and support. In Ontario, arts and culture funding (for all agencies that support arts and culture, apart from Ontario Creates, a film/media fund) have been affected by cuts by the Conservative government; there isn't a strong "funding carrot to formalizing" in Ontario. Our circles agreed that what is required is a rethink of what types of support ad hoc groups and collectives need, as opposed to employing strategies like "let's teach you how to write a grant". The fluidity and high levels of responsiveness of ad hoc groups should be highlighted and recognized; hybrid and non-traditional governance and operational structures might be important to reflect the contexts of memberships, cultures, communities and funding environments.

It's a capacity question. [Nesting and supporting emerging groups] works well, most often when things are just getting underway. It's fairly light at the beginning and fairly within the capacity of the organization, especially when there is some reciprocation. But there are definitely limitations — non-profits are strapped for resources and can only take on so much. And, if the organization wants to access charitable status, there are barriers there too: with stricter guidelines, I have seen those [nested] opportunities close.

### **Ad hoc and Nesting Strategies**

*Further research:* The prevalence and importance of nesting was clear in our research, particularly among ad hoc groups and among organizations working with or supporting Indigenous, BPOC, LGBTQIA2+, and/or Disabled organizations and groups. Further research is needed to understand the impetus (capacity needs, cultural ways of organizing), range of nesting relationships and the kinds of institutional mentorships in order to share wisdom with other communities and provide strategies and resources to further support organizations across the country.

*Targeted and strategic funding:* It is clear that nesting serves an important role in building strong arts ecosystems, but is little understood or recognized as a vital, meaningful, short- and long-term approach to cultural production and capacity building. Funders might consider establishing targeted and strategic project funding for nested relationships, and explore how the work of nest hosts might be properly supported — or boosted — particularly for communities that are responding to culturally relevant approaches or otherwise embracing non-dominant structures. Nesting also occurs as a measure to address capacity and funding gaps. Many organizations provide informal nesting and support to a range of organizations and artists (via space and equipment shares, accounting support and other services), yet struggle with capacity to do so. Funders need to explore the gaps in funding and develop creative, responsive programs that support arts ecosystems in small, northern communities.

*Expanding definitions:* Normative structures, and typical definitions of ‘established’ and ‘professional’ may not be reflective of communities, cultural approaches to governance and/or diversity. If funding agencies, organizations and communities aim to be more responsive and inclusive by responding to calls for culturally-relevant approaches, indigenizing and decolonizing systems, and greater inclusivity of diversity (BPOC, neuro-diversity, disability) then we need to look much more closely at ad hoc groups and cultural contexts for meaningful and relevant ways of organizing and engaging systems of support.

## *Art Service Organizations*

Organizations that provide service, support and capacity building for the arts and culture sector function at provincial, municipal, community and grassroots levels. They work to support the arts sector in a variety of ways: by supporting professional development, training and mentoring; promoting artists and their work through organizing public engagements (exhibits, concerts, readings); and advocating to funders and policy makers on behalf of artists. In some cases, they provide some funding and other resources to the sector.

The ASO sector is vital yet constrained in Canada, often undertaking vast and important work with limited budgets and human resources. Due to external pressures and financial realities, the more traditional intermediary work of producing economic capital from cultural value remains important for the survival of the arts sector. Internally-motivated and externally mandated socially engaged organizational intermediary work adds another pressure and responsibility to this sector.

Meaningful reflection and strategies for change involve time, care, commitment and reflexivity. Similarly, meaningful collaborations with other organizations also involve time and care, yet many ASOs remain under-resourced. Further understanding of ASOs as organizational intermediaries can help develop advocacy and rationales for support of this important work, as metrics and quantifiable outputs often remain paramount to communicate worth and value to funders (Campbell, Evans, Wowk 10).

Ultimately, ASOs increase cultural production and access to the arts and culture, by supporting artists/creators, communities, audiences and cultural sectors at different scales. There are few ASOs functioning within rural and isolated communities, which might speak to why business/arts and other mixed-sector relationships have developed in some regions, such as Newfoundland and Labrador. Provincial and national ASOs just don’t have the capacity to meaningfully reach the farthest extensions of their mandated coverage areas.

In addition to higher access to ASOs and their services, artists and arts organizations in large and typically southern urban centres have access to a number of resources, including arts foundations, allocated city arts funding, higher audiences and larger numbers of businesses and populations for sponsorships, volunteerism and other support. The pandemic has seen many organizations and ASOs turn to virtual programming, making many workshops and training sessions available to communities outside of the urban core. However, the membership structure of most ASOs means that those in rural, northern and isolated communities are less likely to become members, and therefore less likely to access these professional development and other

programs. As a result, these digital strategies are less effective in northern and rural spaces of ASO catchment areas. Overall, the membership fees and member benefits don't necessarily make sense for artists farther from the urban core. Some of our conversants called for 'heat mapping' to demonstrate how and where services, supports and funding are distributed. It is important to consider whether rural and Northern regions or communities are supported by provincial, regional, or urban-based ASOs, and whether existing ASOs have specific mandates to represent rural/remote regions or communities.

Just as Newfoundland and Labrador have benefitted from collaborations between sectors through the work of Business and Arts Newfoundland, Creative Coast (Vancouver Island) has been actively building cross-sectoral collaborations and engaging synergies in tourism and economic development, and scaffolding funding from arts and non-arts sources, including academic research funding. These strategies have enabled expanded arts service, diversified income sources, as well as cross-sector recognition of arts and culture importance. Cross-sectoral partnerships and collaborations require additional work to ensure clarity of objectives, establish clear partnership agreements, and to navigate sometimes different priorities and views about the role of the arts. These ensure that artists maintain their own visions regarding cultural production, and arts organizations maintain their capacity to advocate. However, these collaborations reflect the dynamics of rural communities and the importance of networked and cross-pollinated collaborations in these contexts.

In 2020, Mass Culture, in partnership with Ryerson University, created a national map of ASOs<sup>14</sup> that outlined their discipline, activities, research, collaborations, mentorship activities, the jurisdictions they served, and rates of employment. This is an ongoing project to try to map the location of ASOs within each province in Canada, as well as their collaborations and networks over time.

## *Advocacy*

Advocacy is a central theme that has been mentioned throughout this report because advocacy doesn't tend to be situated neatly into 'one' area of concern to artists and organizations. It is a constant that crosses all elements of community and organizational life: creative, economic, social, identity, history, and politics, to name just a few. We highlight it here in order to return to it through concepts of storytelling and diversity.

The existence of regional and rural ASOs and the reach of existing ASOs into the regions is affected by a number of factors, including historical investments into the sector, strength of networks, available staff capacities, and reliable digital, and internet infrastructure. Another critical factor is a clear, dedicated and meaningful strategy, if not mandate, to engage, support, resource and advocate for northern and rural arts communities. Many provincial and national ASOs operate with a membership structure that allows only organizations to join – individual artists cannot. While this is a logical structure that integrates scales of art service, the reality is that there are relatively few arts organizations in rural, northern and remote communities, and fewer regional ASOs, which leaves many communities and artists unrepresented.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://aso-map.massculture.ca/>

In addition to the gap in provincial and federal ASO representation, there is little direct support from provincial and federal funders; in the case of the Canada Council for the Arts, there is almost no outreach across the country, and this is coupled with an opaque system and no opportunities for feedback on unsuccessful grant submissions. So, where there are no ASOs to support applicants, artists and small organizations are doubly challenged. For instance, Northern Ontario currently does not have a regional ASO, and provincial cuts eliminated the Northeastern outreach position within the Ontario Arts Council (OAC). The Northwestern position continued, but with increased pressure on that one staff member to adequately address the diverse needs of artists, arts organizations and ad hoc collectives, in both the northeast and northwest regions. All of this results in a large knowledge gap and understanding of northern, rural and remote arts and culture structures, needs, and challenges.

The Media Arts Network Ontario (MANO) identified a number of needs of arts sector organizations, ad hoc collectives, artist groups, and artists/creators across Northern Ontario in small city, rural, and remote communities. These are outlined in its report *Circulations: Navigating the Digital in Northeastern Ontario (2022)*. One of those needs was increased collaboration and relationships between municipalities, small cities, and rural communities to support organizations, ad hoc collectives, and artists, especially in the absence of a regional/provincial ASOs:

How can small groups share curatorial, administrative, training, and other functions; maintain local relevance, control over their programming; and be able to steer direction and governance within these nested, networked, and collaborative structures? This question is relevant when considering the role of municipalities and cities. Most organizations and artists would agree that they have a role to play in supporting the arts sector; when local arts councils or regional ASOs are absent, it may be that municipalities, economic development agencies, and other community development organizations have more capacity (human resources, funding, access to spaces) than small arts organizations. However, control over programming and governance, and the flexibility to be responsive, are critically important. (MANO 275)

The difficulty is that while the arts sector in rural, northern and remote regions in Canada attempt to consistently advocate, develop change tactics, and resource alternative options, they are also functioning with very little buffer for their own operation. The federal and provincial funding bodies, despite the known gaps within the art sector for rural and northern regions, have not consistently supported the types of change that are necessary to advance a vibrant arts sector in these regions. Administrators in these communities are exhausted by multiple external expectations on top of their roles in the arts sector.

Advocacy contributes to an organization's ability to plan and assess future success, including the varied forms of community support that might be feasible, and develop critical system changes to further the benefits of present and future equitable and inclusive relationships. In response to our survey question regarding "Please list the supports you are unable to provide", one respondent noted:

The most important need in our community is to provide value and acceptance of art and artists. Our sole offering at this time are the events we run and a website which we are learning to use. Operating funding combined with policy advocacy (reflecting small rural society) and data report development will be most useful as a first step. Our next steps may be to create a Cooperative – providing space with access to a variety of tools, equipment and technology. Virtual mentorship for training and career development would help in strengthening skills for confidence and longevity of the society.

Fundraising, coaching, mentorships between the business or other sectors and the art sector, digital services, knowledge and research hubs, business workshops and business volunteer programs are all aimed at shared knowledge and application between the other sectors and the arts community in order to build capacity, develop evolving networks, and share resources.

### **Qualitative & Quantitative Storytelling**

Participants cite both an ongoing lack of understanding, as well as an undervaluing of the role and value of arts and cultural organizations in local communities. As noted elsewhere in this report, there is insufficient relevant and meaningful community-level data available on the status and impact of arts organizations in rural communities, and data that is gathered from outside sources isn't shared with the arts organization or community in ways that they can use the data for impact:

Conversant 1: Data- how to interpret, how to make it tell a story, we don't have those skill sets with the one person led sector.

Conversant 2: The pandemic shows a lot of the ways that data rapidly changes, but also that the data that was collected [by an external Festival evaluator] was for a festival that was not sustainable for our town and municipal size. I don't know how to take that data and ...if we scaled it down, this is what it would look like, this is how it would be beneficial. I don't have those initial figures, or any of that information. All of that exists in the study outside of the community. I can't go through and sense-make that, even though I want to do a festival that has half the people and artists, it will still have this impact and footprint.

Compounding the challenges of demonstrating the impact of the arts in local communities is the limitation of the national Census. Stats Canada doesn't track artists who may not work full time in the arts, generate all their income from arts and cultural activities, or formally identify as 'artist' (for a number of reasons including definitions, presence, income levels, and cultural factors); the income, sales and economic spin off of all arts activities is not fully reflected through the Census. As a result, municipalities, economic development offices and other important agencies do not fully understand the impact of the role the arts play in local communities – from social benefits to economic ones (including tourism) through to creating liveable cities.

Similarly, the cost of providing cultural programming (and therefore the economic spin off in local communities) is hard to track and demonstrate. Compounding the issues are the additional barriers and costs that organizations in rural, northern and isolated areas have to factor into their budgets and time. Municipalities and other agencies don't typically understand or account for these realities.

Arts organizations must continually articulate their contribution to cultural, social and community well-being, engagement, job creation, tourism attraction and other benefits. If they aren't highly skilled or effective at gathering, interpreting and deploying qualitative and quantitative measures, they are less likely to garner support, whether that is in the form of in-kind services, sponsorships, fundraising or municipal funding. Respondents noted that this kind of advocacy work takes a lot of time, effort and capacity – which they often don't have.

There are high expectations of the creative sector by community, municipalities, funders. We're forced to wear many hats and be 'experts' – and many times this falls on one person in small orgs. To keep the creative sector afloat you need to say YES to workloads and tasks outside your mandate, knowledge base, and capacities. At the same time, creative sector workers are underpaid, do not receive medical coverage/benefits, no pension etc. This perpetuates burnout, creative leads leaving to other sectors, or moving out of smaller and rural communities.

## **Indigenous, BPOC, LGBTQ2+, Disabled Communities**

Advocacy, inclusion, diversity, and equity are important pillars of systems change within the arts sector but there are disparities in how organizations develop relationships and work to foster changes to the overall arts sector systems.

Meaningful inclusion is more difficult to quantify, measure, or report back to funders, communities, or the public. These challenges of quantification and measurement suggest the importance of ongoing responsiveness and continual work, rather than celebrating success or achievement with regards to diversity, or assuming the work of diversification has been accomplished. Another respondent states that although the sector that they work in is known as “progressive,” further work is needed to foster impactful diversity and inclusion: “so I think that as much as the artist-run world probably feels like it's one of the most progressive, there's still a lot of change that needs to happen and a lot of power shifting that is slowly happening. There's a lot of tension with that” (Participant 8). In another interview, the respondent notes that these are ongoing challenges, and that inclusion permeates externally (with regards to programming and communities that are served) and internally (with regards to internal working practices): “there is the challenge of being more inclusive, there is the challenge of developing healthier working relationships [...] our existence is founded in challenges” (Participant 20). (Campbell, Evans, Wowk 5)



Each region highlighted the necessity of advocating for underserved and marginalized groups within the arts sector by gathering data that shows inequity and historical patterns of exclusion and enables strong storytelling for funders and communities. Organizationally, inclusivity means to work directly with underserved communities to support initiatives and develop trust; it also means to assess the power structures and imbalances in order to engage sector revisioning by repurposing how data is gathered (heat mapping) and engaging with other sectors for equitable and relational funding:

Conversant 1: One of the things that came out of the arts impact study is that there is a large overserved population, white 60+ extremely well served. Others, indigenous creatives, youth, LGBTQ+ in rural and urban areas, and generally rural areas, are underserved....There are really not ASO type structures in most rural areas, so we're starting to map the assets. We knew right away we'd do that map, and it would show geographically overserved areas, and then within those overserved areas, overserved populations...I'm very interested in what if the arts sector had a marketing department...I'm putting a proposal into Pacifican, which used to be Western Economic Diversification, to pilot a 3 year Creative Economic Development Office. This would be a first in the country, as far as I can tell. And I've been doing way too much research into the Creative Economy and the punchline is that that model has overserved urban and privileged people for the past 20 years, but there is a new approach which is, for lack of a better word, rural creative economic development that is emerging. And that contains all the ingredients that are missing in these smaller communities, and it also doesn't prioritize growth, but [rather] community resilience and sustainable prosperity.

Conversant 2: One point that is super, super important right now as we work in a different context...some wheels need to be reinvented...really really need to be reinvented. There are a lot of things that have been done in certain ways, but we need to be looking at them in different ways. I think there are loads of people doing that, but one thing that I'm thinking of, in terms of ASO's in BC – urban/rural everyone, is trust based collaboration. And I think we're seeing relationships that are trust and value alignment. And we are tackling really really big things in the sector in really big ways.

Below are a series of tables that offer data to show that there are barriers to funding, programs, services, and access for underserved populations within our respondent group. Our survey was small – funding and resources are needed to engage in further regionally based, multi-year, community generated studies, tied to demonstrated change practices in the form of programs, applied training and effective organizational behavior strategies that could offer continuity to supported systems change.



Underserved Table 5 shows the percentages of programs, projects, and other supports that organizations in our survey group direct to underserved artists and organizations:

**Underserved Table 5:** Count of organizations with 50% or more of activities and supports going to underserved artists and organizations by region

	Offering 50% or more of their services to underserved population	Offering less than 50% of their services to underserved population
British Columbia	33.3%	66.7%
East	28.6%	71.4%
Manitoba	33.3%	66.7%
Ontario	44.4%	55.6%
National	34.9%	65.1%

All offer less than 50% of their services to underserved populations in the arts sector. In fact, across all four regions, only 34.9% of organizations offer 50% or more of their services to underserved populations.

Underserved Table 1 demonstrates services offered to underserved populations by organizational type:

**Underserved Table 1:** Organizations who provide a majority of programs and services to underserved populations by organizational type

	Offering 50% or more of their services to underserved population	Proportion offering 50% or more of their services to underserved populations	Offering less than 50% of their services to underserved population	Proportion offering less than 50% of their services to underserved population	Total
Federal arts organizations	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	1
Provincial arts organizations	3	60.0%	2	40.0%	5
Community-based arts organizations	8	34.8%	15	65.2%	23
Regional arts organizations	3	33.3%	6	66.7%	9
Heritage museum w/ an art gallery	0	0.0%	1	100.0%	1
Music industry	0	0.0%	1	100.0%	1

association					
Non-arts organization (e.g., band office, business improvement association, municipality, cultural centre etc.)	0	0.0%	2	100.0%	2
Not for profit focused on economic development through arts, culture & heritage - but not exclusively those sectors	0	0.0%	1	100.0%	1

Of note is that, of 9 regional arts organizations, only 3 offer 50% or more of their services to underserved populations; and of 23 community based arts organizations, only 8 offer 50% or more of their services to underserved populations. Of the sector organization types identified here, only four provide programs and services to underserved populations.

**Underserved Table 2:** Organizations who provide a majority of programs and services to underserved populations broken down by source of funding

	Offering 50% or more of their services to underserved population	Proportion offering 50% or more of their services to underserved population	Offering less than 50% of their services to underserved population	Proportion offering less than 50% of their services to underserved population	Total
Nesting/resource sharing	8	61.5%	5	38.5%	13
Municipal in-kind	7	46.7%	8	53.3%	15
Federal arts grants	12	40.0%	18	60.0%	30
Provincial arts grants	14	35.0%	26	65.0%	40
Business/arts partnerships	9	34.6%	17	65.4%	26

Municipal grants	9	29.0%	22	71.0%	31
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Underserved Table 2 shows that 61.5% of organizations offer 50% or more of their services to underserved populations in the form of nesting/resource sharing; this is followed by municipal in-kind, with 46.7% of municipalities offering this form of support. Federal, provincial, business arts partnerships, and municipal grants represent greater percentages of organizations that provide less than 50% of their services to underserved populations.

Our regional conversations offered some strategies for digital engagement as a way of advocating for inclusion and equity, including working with organizations who need support, to foster stronger relationships in the arts sector across populations. Our survey showed that there are gaps in what the digital sector offers, too: the services offered, proportionately, by 50% or more of organizations showed

- Under 40% of organizations offered services relating to digital exhibiting and presenting platforms, digital promotion of artists and events, general software and subscription services, policy advocacy and virtual Human Resource support.
- Under 30% of organizations offered services relating to digital accounting, technical and network support, virtual mentorship and training, data and report development and project management.

**Underserved Table 4:** Digital needs for organizations who provide a majority of programs and services to underserved populations

Digital support needed	Offering 50% or more of their services to underserved population	Proportion offering 50% or more of their services to underserved populations	Offering less than 50% of their services to underserved population	Proportion offering less than 50% of their services to underserved population	Total
Many of these things we have but could use more of them	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	1
Access supports	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	1
Administrative support/bookkeeping	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	1
Language/translation/cultural supports	9	52.9%	8	47.1%	17
Business, arts & other organizational partnership, affiliations for projects and/or resource sharing	6	46.2%	7	53.8%	13

Digital exhibition/ presenting platforms for artists (e.g., online shows, artist talks, performances etc.)	6	42.9%	8	57.1%	14
Digital promotion of artists & events (e.g., artist map, online sales etc.)	5	38.5%	8	61.5%	13
General software and subscription services (e.g., Zoom, Adobe etc.)	8	38.1%	13	61.9%	21
Policy advocacy re: needs of the sector, accommodations that reflect ad-hoc/rural realities	9	37.5%	15	62.5%	24
Virtual human resource support (e.g., hiring, training, & staff supervision etc.)	6	37.5%	10	62.5%	16
Digital accounting (e.g., finance, payroll, budget, reporting etc.)	3	30.0%	7	70.0%	10
Technical & network support including technical training	5	27.8%	13	72.2%	18
Virtual mentorship & training (e.g., curatorial training, artistic/career development)	5	28.8%	13	72.2%	18
Data & report development re: economic impact of the creative sector via internet and online forums	5	25.0%	15	75.0%	20

Project management (e.g., grant development, strategic planning, leadership planning etc.)	4	25.0%	12	75.0%	16
None		0.0%	2	100.0%	2

While this report discussed overall capacity, funding, and staffing – and the struggles of organizations to address sector needs without adequate resources – this small sample size of data reveals that rural and northern organizations that identify within Indigenous, BPOC, LGBTQIA2+, and/or Disabled communities have even fewer resources with which to move beyond ‘maintenance’ or survive organizationally. As one conversant noted, questions of access, service, and data entail:

Huge ethical questions...every project that involves data or info, or curation, it comes down to resource hubs, what are including or not, what are we perpetuating, harm or not? That’s difficult ... Even if you start from basics and rethink again, who is collecting it...what is the transparency, why are you collecting the info? We heard that from an Indigenous evaluator specialist to “start from values and why are you asking those questions, what is the point...that’s something we keep going back to: what is the point, why are we doing this, is it acceptable to ask that question?”

### Northeastern Ontario ASO Gaps

Unlike the other three regions and regional ASOs that participated in this research project, all of which had strong rural membership bases and relationships, members of the Northeastern research group identified that the lack of representation and coordinated collaboration across the region are a significant problem for the sector. As there isn’t a single regionally-mandated ASO<sup>15</sup>, the northeast cultural sector is not being supported and advanced with relevant regional storytelling, data capture and sharing, advocacy, policy development, professional development, collaboration building, and training and mentorship.

As we have seen around the region and throughout the conversations, there are a number of local factors (besides funding) that contribute to the development of professional, contemporary arts practices. These factors often manifest in clusters: common characteristics include the presence of professional artists who have paved the way for others and become mentors; the existence of

<sup>15</sup> The Northern Ontario Arts Association is regional, but primarily organizes an annual visual arts exhibition hosted in various communities. They do not provide arts service and capacity building activities. “CION Sudbury is the single media arts service organization in the region with a mandate to support the film and music industries, although their reach is limited by discipline and geography. Creative Industries (North Bay) organizes the local arts sector but does not have a regional mandate. NORDIK Institute has a regional mandate but is not an arts service organization (it works across all economic and cultural sectors) and primarily focuses on research, although it has helped establish networks and projects in the past.” (MANO 21)

institutions of support (formal and informal); access to appropriate technology; forms of training to learn how to use the equipment; training and exposure to myriad aspects that make up a professional arts career (analogue, virtual, and hybrid); and diverse spaces to exhibit and disseminate work (digital, analogue, and hybrid). (MANO 372)

While there are ASOs with Ontario-wide mandates and national ASOs mandated to serve all provinces, most do not have a presence in the northern region. If they do have the mandate to cover the region, they may not have the capacity or understanding of the region to do so meaningfully. In some cases, the ASO membership structure doesn't allow for individual members to join; or the lack of meaningful benefits and cost doesn't attract northern-based membership, which leaves many artists without representation. As a result of these issues, the northeastern Ontario research conversants expressed a desire to establish a collaborative/cooperative structure or strategy to meet their arts service needs. This finding reflects similar results from the extensive research conducted by the Media Arts Network of Ontario in 2021-22. A recurring need identified by those interviewed (175+ artists and cultural workers) was that of regional networks, collectivity, representation, advocacy and shared resourcing.

The strategies suggested in the MANO report included a decentralized, networked structure that was hybrid (both digital and offline and in the community) and engaged both organizations and individuals that actively organize, and provide, some form of art service. As the report notes, "Decentralized models can help reduce the risk of flattening the textured contexts of local communities, diverse experiences, and varied access of artists across the region" (MANO 276). Jude Ortiz, the lead researcher at the NORDIK Institute in Sault Ste Marie further commented:

What I've heard is a simple solution—just have one organization, have them do it all—which is totally ridiculous because there are too many things for one organization to do. I'm not really sure about the functionality of it, how it could possibly work. The northeast is different than the northwest, and there are Francophone, Indigenous, and Anglophone communities. It really boils down to, what can you do at the community level? I think that's a more manageable level. Develop strong networks and information flows within the communities and have them connect to other organizations on a broader scale, across locales, creating a collaboration of collaborations. (MANO 276)

Whatever structure the region's representatives decide upon, engaging existing arts sector advocates and animators ('nimble magpies') will be important.

It is important to focus on "nimble magpies"—the animators of networks who act as functioning liaisons between networks within communities or sectors. They provide an essential service that links artists and organizations and communities and should have access to financial support, with training, to continue to build a robust media arts sector in the North. They underpin networks and act as "people-as-infrastructure," animators within communities who are turned to and often work informally, beyond capacity and without support in advisory and liaison roles on behalf of the creative sector. The

sorts of advice and guidance includes how to navigate the funding sector, capacity building, professional development, networking, organizing, and building visibility. (MANO 366)

## **ASO Strategies**

*Cross-sectoral collaboration:* ASOs might explore building, renewing or revitalizing existing relationships in the community or region, with groups such as economic development offices, training institutions, colleges and universities (particularly arts, media, economic development, tourism and public policy programs). These relationships might provide opportunities to scaffold shared objectives and missions, such as digital literacy, shared services (training and mentorship projects), collaborative advocacy at the municipal level, impact storytelling and audience building. Clearly these strategies require capacity, which translates into additional grant submissions, and nesting or creative financing; however, with cross-sectoral collaboration, non-arts funding avenues become possible, along with shared submissions, and expanded HR.

*Addressing ASO representation gaps:* Existing provincial and federal ASOs might explore creating northern and/or rural caucuses/memberships and directed strategies to more meaningfully represent the needs of underserved regions. Some strategies could include directing a portion of the ASO budget toward an organization in the region that is already providing some art service, even if not formally mandated (and therefore not funded).

*Digital/virtual resource sharing by ASOs:* Hosting regional conversations and gatherings (on and offline and hybrid) can help build networks and reduce additional arts service work by organizations without the mandate or capacity to organize the region. Support the creation of digital networks and meaningful data sharing. Ensure digital resources are easily accessible (such as HR templates, space sharing protocols, and partnership agreements).

*Mixed membership ASO structures and fees:* Adapt existing membership structures to allow for both organizational and individual memberships, so that artists living in regions, without representative community level ASOs or discipline-based non-profits, are represented; similarly, enable membership for ad hoc collectives and groups. Expand member definitions: for instance, visual arts doesn't always include media arts, and interdisciplinary organizations and organizations with a community engaged arts practice (which is often interdisciplinary) may not easily fit into a membership definition. Make membership affordable with a range of membership fees (organizational, individual, underrepresented/priority groups).

## **Northeastern Ontario ASO Development Strategy**

*Structure:* Explore a decentralized, networked structure that activates digital and on the ground relationships. Engage organizations and individuals that are actively organizing and providing some form of art service. In the short-term (or in the long term, if the creation of a formal ASO is decided against), it may be valuable to identify several organizations that currently provide some form of art service (even if its outside of their formal mission) to form an ad hoc group, collective or collaboration. Collaboratively access funding to begin the

process of bringing people together for conversation about directions, strategies and structures. Regional leadership could migrate between individuals/communities and organizations to mitigate burn out, expand capacity and expand meaningful participation and representation, while simultaneously avoiding entrenched/context specific perspectives about community needs and approaches.

*Development funding/capacity:* It may be worth exploring how to expand existing ASO reach (provincial or federal), by creating a northeastern caucus or strategy with an allocated budget in lieu of starting an independent organization. It may also be possible that an existing ASO, or several ASOs, might pool some resources toward conversations and gatherings to discuss regional strategies, support a regional coordinator/rep and collectively apply for funding at provincial and federal levels.



## Conclusion

The impetus for this research was to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the contexts, capacities, and workings of (primarily) small arts service organizations and ad hoc groups and collectives from, or working directly with, northern, rural and isolated communities. The distinct nature of these communities and the realities of these organizations and groups is less known and less prioritized in research; rural and northern cultural sectors are less able to gain traction from a range of supports at different scales. Compounding these issues is that rural and northern organizations, as is demonstrated by our research and others', tend to work under-capacity and are under-resourced, although they fulfill many roles and provide myriad and sometimes complex services for communities – frequently by necessity, outside of their formal mandates. They have limited capacity (HR, finances and skills) to access existing, or create, analyze and disseminate new data, and struggle with data 'hoarding' and finding relevant community-level data. In an environment in which data is important for storytelling and advocacy, and to establish return on investment, having access to, and/or the skills to collect good data is critical.

Our research confirmed that the realities of ad hoc collectives and groups, and the realities of small, northern and rural arts service organizations, have not been given enough attention. This report offers insight into regional representation of rural northern and remote communities. It includes rich survey data which is supplemented by conversations with our regional coordinators and conversations with three to five individuals who have been working within the art sector in each region. Additional work included a review of existing research regarding funding, connectivity, art sector organizations and digital initiatives and barriers. We found that, in general, ad hoc groups and ASOs do not have adequate representation or support within rural, northern and isolated regions; they consistently lack resources and operate in a condition of precarity: they struggle to maintain operations; they function with extremely small staff sizes; and they do not have access to stable or adequate funding – coupled with high expectations from funders, municipalities and communities to deliver a variety of services and impacts. Ad hoc collectives and groups are further under-resourced and under-researched due to their unincorporated status, and are similarly underrepresented by provincial and federal arts service organizations. Artists who live in communities or regions where there are no arts service or representational entities, are not adequately represented, or supported.

We researched the digital platform projects available within some of the regions, such as platform sharing or the adoption of other digital tools. We found that while there are some platforms that are shared, connectivity, literacy, and capacity are all conditions of digital adaptability. Many organizations noted that pivoting to digital forms or sharing is difficult when the organization is already beyond capacity. While the benefits of sharing platforms for HR, financial administration, or even volunteer organization is recognized, there are substantial disparities in data literacy. Arts administrators often expressed feeling overwhelmed and burned out, as well as being 'expected' by communities to be everything, particularly in communities where municipalities themselves struggle to provide service and there is a general lack of community level support systems. While a number of broader and specific strategies were identified in this research project, it is clear that while these strategies might enable greater capacity, the condition for establishing greater capacity is capacity. A range of

strategic investments and funding programs are necessary to address structural inequity. These investments and funding infusions will support rural and northern arts organizations and the cultural workers in the sector. Currently, the arts sector is losing them to better opportunities in other sectors – which means organizations lose their skills, knowledge, and relationships.

Our research found that there are a number of specific trends and approaches that highlight how rural and northern ASOs and ad hoc groups function and how these approaches inform the kinds of digital strategies that might be possible. It offers a view of the kind of structures and infrastructure that will help them be successful:

- ▷ Rural and northern ASOs and ad hoc groups are highly responsive to their communities; even if their formal mandate isn't art service, or to be 'community engaged', they operate that way by inclination, informed by care and need.
- ▷ Ad hoc collectives are particularly responsive to the realities and needs of their members and communities, and as they aren't bound by the strictures of formal and dominant organizational structures, are more able to be fluid, responsive to their member needs and to changing economic, social and community contexts. Ad hoc collectives, even those with strong and long track records, are stymied by assumptions that they are 'emerging' or 'unprofessional'; their organizational model often restricts them from accessing funding. Ad hoc collectives may not be able to incorporate due to capacity needs, or choose not to, in order to create more culturally relevant, non-dominant or otherwise more attuned organizational structures. They are therefore also able to meaningfully respond to diverse memberships (such as neuro-diverse or disabled artists).
- ▷ Nesting – in which one organization provides organizational supports to another group (from HR and space sharing to acting as lead applicant on grant submissions) – is an active structure in many communities. These arrangements expand capacity, integration and knowledge transfer, and respond to the needs of the community in creative ways. Nesting challenges normative operating structures and counters competition for resources. These arrangements, however, are little recognized and are under-supported by existing funding strategies. They can further stretch the capacity of organizations that are already working under capacity.
- ▷ Networked approaches are important on a number of levels: they build capacity and support for highly stretched organizations and cultural leaders and respond to geographical contexts. Cultural clusters build social capital, attract more visibility and generate a range of capacities and knowledge. Networking between communities, and inter-regionally, can be very beneficial in rural and northern spaces because of smaller demographics and dispersed organizations.
- ▷ Hybrid (on and offline) approaches are often necessary in rural and northern communities. Interpersonal relationships (between cultural leaders and between organizations and municipalities and other local agencies) are critical, especially if connectivity is uneven or digital infrastructures unstable or underdeveloped. Collaboration and community integration between sectors is important in small communities. It enhances organizational visibility, scaffolds volunteer capacity, and expands organizational capacity and income sources.

- ▷ Municipal relationships and investments (in kind and financial) are extremely important for arts organizations working in rural, northern and isolated areas. They make a substantial difference in the viability, capacity and impact of arts organizations, while simultaneously expanding municipal capacity. There is uneven support and awareness of the value of local arts sectors, as well as misunderstandings about the legalities, possibilities and existing examples of municipal investments through long-term fund development, flow-through capital, foundation partnerships, granting and micro-loans.

## **Impact & Recommendations**

Through the efforts of this project, we:

- ▷ Convened representatives of regional support groups/ASOs from across Canada to provide their expertise, review the results of the survey, identify current gaps, and discuss digital resource sharing and relevant governance structures to address these needs.
- ▷ Supported four regions in conversations. This led to the proposal of a collaborative strategy with two intersecting directions: a digital resource-sharing platform designed to build capacity, profile, and data access; and a longitudinal research study to assess the impact of qualitative and quantitative storytelling and resource sharing over several years.
- ▷ Developed a series of broad and specific recommendations and strategies toward increasing art sector capacity by enabling access to resources, data, collaborative opportunities, and decreased isolation for generally underserved and/or under-capacity rural and northern arts service organizations and ad hoc groups.
- ▷ Ensured that the shared platform model is rooted in the well-being of cultural workers. Designed a multi-phased strategy to propose to funders, investors and stakeholders that will ensure the project has the capacity for its design, implementation and management.
- ▷ Fostered consensus regarding collective governance and community control of the use of the proposed collaborative digital strategies, including data collection, and sought working models for ethical forms of data-sharing.
- ▷ Collected, analyzed and made available to the four regions, relevant, community/region specific data that can help build their profiles and support their work to advocate and tell the stories of regional arts sectors. Specifically, this research offers representative data that public sector funding agencies, policy makers, researchers and communities can use for greater understanding of the regions. The access and distribution of relevant, community-level data can potentially contribute to improved program delivery and funding/financial investment by addressing regional disparities and the over-emphasis on urban realities and large incumbents within the sector.

## Potential Impact of Proposed Strategies

Possible outcomes of the proposed strategies, as identified by participating arts organizations in each region:

- ▷ Public sector funding agencies, policy makers, and researchers will benefit from better information regarding a large proportion of the arts sector who are currently underrepresented in the data. Service organizations and regional arts councils will benefit from access to data shared and profiled on the proposed shared platform. This information sharing can contribute to targeted funding programs and improved program delivery to address regional disparities and the current over-emphasis on urban populations and urban contexts within the sector.
- ▷ The development of shared service models, as part of a digital strategy, could have profound impacts for cultural workers. Shared services could reduce expectations and demands for unpaid labour and enable cultural workers to focus on the core missions of their organizations and practices. It will also increase skill sets, expertise and a focused portfolio, rather than one person spreading their capacity across multiple portfolios – a shift that would result in greater impact. Participating groups will benefit from an increased network within and outside their regions and advance community learning and peer support.
- ▷ The development of shared digital strategies and tools for regional arts support organizations can lead to improved administrative and organizational capacity and professional development. It will support resilience and development while reducing sectoral and cultural worker isolation. Resource sharing can help address instabilities and precarities (staffing, training, advocacy, program development, access to resources and turn-over) and enable improved cross-sector relationships. Similarly, the peer-approved, best practices, and collegial aspects of collectivity can help build confidence in the services and supports offered through shared strategies – for small, understaffed organizations, collaboration can relieve not only the stress of new development, but also hesitations and concerns about ‘getting it right’.
- ▷ It must be noted, however, that without sustained funding, support and investment from a range of sources (municipal, community, regional, provincial, federal, and inter-sectoral), the instability of organizations will be exacerbated by the work involved in creating longitudinal research studies and implementing resource sharing strategies.

## Additional Resources

In this appendix we have collected links to existing research, policy studies and other resources that we referred to, which includes case studies of municipal programs and strategies to support arts organizations and the arts sector.

Getting to Yes And! How Municipalities can work with community partners. Community Foundation of Canada. Recorded event. May 20, 2021.

<https://communityfoundations.ca/events/getting-to-yes-and-how-municipalities-can-work-with-community-partners/>

Arts BC: DigistArts:

<https://artsbc.org/2021/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/DigistARTS-Final-Report.pdf> digital literacy

- [Thrive Digital](#)
- [Advocacy and Cultural Planning Toolkits](#)

Creative Coast Initiatives:

- [Central Island Digital Creation Hub](#) - what if artists had access to a wide variety of digital/tech tools and a tech coach.
- [Info Hub pilot](#) - what if arts orgs and artists could cut through the noise and easily find high quality, inclusive, meaningful information to support their work?
- [Art Coach Pilot](#) - what if rural/remote and underserved artist communities had greater access to multimedia tools/technologies and ongoing tech coaching

Canadian Centre for the Performing Arts (CAPACOA): Linked Digital Future:

<https://linkeddigitalfuture.ca/about/>

### *Research Reports and Databases*

Mass Culture/Mobilisation Culturelle: <https://massculture.ca/>

### **Municipal Fund and Organization Partnership Examples**

Prince Edward County - The County Foundation administers grants for the Municipality of Prince Edward County – Picton, ON

<https://thecountyfoundation.ca/grants-funds/municipalgrants/>

Kincardine - The Municipality of Kincardine has a fund with the Grey Bruce Community Foundation from which local grants are provided

<https://www.kincardine.ca/en/living-here/kincardine-community-fund.aspx>

Trent Hills - The Municipality of Trent Hills has a fund with the Campbellford Seymour Community Foundation. It is directed by Council

<https://www.trenthills.ca/en/living-here/community-foundation.aspx#>

Southgate - Community Fund management and flow through to local organizations

<https://www.southgate.ca/en/current-opportunities/southgate-community-fund-management.aspx>

South Huron - Township of South Huron - holds a fund (Vitality Fund) and the Sunset Community Foundation with the Community Foundation of Grey Bruce

<https://www.southhuron.ca/en/government/community-grant-program.aspx>

Temiskaming Shores - established a by-law that allows them to empower non-profits in their community.

[https://www.temiskamingshores.ca/uploads/34/doc\\_634151505671040154.pdf?ts=638161327948973461](https://www.temiskamingshores.ca/uploads/34/doc_634151505671040154.pdf?ts=638161327948973461)

Other examples:

<https://thecountyfoundation.ca/grants-funds/municipalgrants/>

<https://www.milton.ca/en/arts-and-recreation/milton-community-fund.aspx>

<http://shuswapfoundation.ca/grants/city-of-salmon-arm-grants/>

<http://www.ericksonmb.ca/endowment-fund.html>

<https://www.porthope.ca/en/your-municipal-government/community-grants.aspx>

<https://www.cornwall.ca/en/city-hall/municipal-grants-program.aspx>

## Organizations Involved in this Project

### British Columbia

- ▷ Rural Arts Inclusion Lab (RAIL): <https://www.ruralinclusion.ca/>
- ▷ ARTS BC: <https://artsbc.org/>
- ▷ Creative Coast: <https://www.creativecoast.ca>
- ▷ Island Mountain Arts <https://support-imarts.com>

### Manitoba

- ▷ Manitoba Arts Network (MAN): <https://manitobaartsnetwork.ca/>
- ▷ Arts Mosaic: <https://www.artsmosaic.ca/>
- ▷ Prairie Fusion Arts and Entertainment: <https://www.prairiefusion.ca/about-us>

### Ontario

- ▷ Creative Industries (CI): <https://creativeindustriesnorth.ca/>

- ▷ Between Pheasants: <https://www.betweenpheasants.com/d17c94591a-content>
- ▷ Near North Media Lab: <https://www.n2m2l.ca/>
- ▷ Thinking Rock: <https://www.thinkingrock.ca/>
- ▷ Indigenous Curatorial Collective: <https://icca.art/>

#### Newfoundland

- ▷ Business and Arts NL: <https://businessandartsnl.com>
- ▷ Storytellers of Canada/Conteurs du Canada: <https://aamp.ca>
- ▷ Writer's Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador: <https://wanl.ca>
- ▷ Music NL: <https://musicnl.ca>

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<https://oc.ca/en/national-arts-and-culture-impact-survey/>
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<https://oc.ca/en/national-arts-and-culture-impact-survey/>, Jan 2021
- Organizational stress and resilience in the arts in Canada (SIA Report 54). Hill Strategies, November 2021  
[https://www.creativecity.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/sia54\\_org\\_stress.pdf](https://www.creativecity.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/sia54_org_stress.pdf)
- The State of Rural Canada III-Bridging Rural Data Gaps. Eds. Main, H.; Breen, S.P.; Collins, D.; Gaspard, V.; Lowery, B.; Minnes, S.; and Reimer, W. Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation, 2019.  
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