

Creating Value with Increased Investment in the Arts: Results of the City of Toronto and Toronto Arts Council consultation with Toronto's cultural sector 2013

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On January, 2013, Toronto City Council approved a resolution to increase the City's investment in arts and culture over the next four years to reach a benchmark of \$25 per capita. Council also directed staff in Economic Development and Culture to consult with Toronto's arts and culture sector to gather input and advice on how to create the greatest value for the additional investment.

To inform artists and cultural workers about the priorities outlined in the Creative Capital Gains report, engage participants in strengthening the arts sector in Toronto, and garner feedback on how to maximize the value of increased investment in the arts. The City of Toronto's Cultural Services and Toronto Arts Council (TAC) hosted a series of stakeholder and public meetings in April 2013.

Between April 5 and 18, more than 300 people attended 9 meetings held in downtown Toronto, Scarborough, Etobicoke and North York. Cultural Services hosted four stakeholder meetings by invitation, and Cultural Services and TAC co-hosted four open roundtable meetings, and Toronto Arts Council hosted one open roundtable meeting.

Meetings ranged in time between two and three hours. To maximize time and opportunities for feedback, participants engaged in facilitated group discussion with one another at tables of 6-8 people. Meetings were divided into three segments:

1. Overview – Participants learned from Cultural Services and TAC about the current funding priorities and the framework for future investment.
2. Discussions – Participants completed three facilitated discussions directed to the City, and/or chose their route through three different facilitated discussions directed to TAC.
3. Wrap-Up – Participants asked questions and provided comments.

At the City sessions, and during the City-focused component of the joint sessions, participants were asked to identify and define the principles that should guide the City as it allocated increased investment in arts and culture; offer their ideas for realizing the priorities outlined in the Creative Capital Gains report; and identify desired outcomes of increased investment in the arts for the city and their own organizations/practice. At the TAC session, and during the TAC-focused component of the joint sessions, participants were asked for their views on how to improve the granting process or assortment of grants; how to make TAC grants more accessible to youth and diverse communities in all areas of the city, and; how to leverage innovation grants to maximize partnerships and impact.

All meetings featured lively and engaged conversations among diverse stakeholders, artists, culture workers, and the public. Discussions captured a wide range of perspectives and topics, enabling participants to exchange ideas and deliver informed feedback and input.

This report provides a summary of the feedback delivered through those meetings. It is by no means an exhaustive account of what was said, but serves to highlight the major themes and areas of common interest and understanding among such a diverse range of participants. Most of the feedback applies to both the City and TAC, particularly the largest section of the report, "Priorities for strengthening Toronto's arts sector".

Principles to Guide Investment in the Arts

In their groups of 6-8 people, participants were asked to identify up to six principles that they as a group believed should guide the City as it allocates investment in culture. We made no attempt to reach a consensus among the numerous groups present at each meeting, or across meetings. Remarkably, there was tremendous overlap between all groups, highlighting broad agreement across Toronto's arts sector of the values that should underpin future investment. Eleven principles emerged from the discussions as shared by virtually every group. Though not every group used the words shown here to title their principles, the definitions they provided lead us to believe that the following is consistent with their intent.

Artist centred – Ultimately, it is up to Toronto's artists, arts workers and creative workers to earn Toronto's reputation as a cultural capital. Strengthening Toronto's arts sector, creating more stable and prosperous arts organizations and making Toronto a better place to be an artist should be the ultimate focus of investment in the arts.

Asset Based Community Development – Build on the existing resources and assets in the community, be they physical assets such as libraries, parks or community hubs, or existing organizations, artists, and initiatives. Ensure new investment builds upon networks and relationships that the community has already built and invested into, to maximize the impact of the new resources.

Collaboration – Cooperation and partnership between artists, organizations, across disciplines and across sectors should be encouraged. Exchanges, learning, and opportunities to share best practices should be promoted.

Communication – Provide the necessary information in easily accessible forms, in clear, plain language. Wherever possible, provide information in multiple forms and in multiple languages.

Community ownership – Nurture an environment of community expression. Make information and resources available while inviting Toronto's communities to define and realize their own ideas. Recognize the arts as a powerful tool to address social issues at the community level.

Diversity – Recognize the arts sector reflects the tremendous diversity of the city at large. The diversity of art forms and practitioners should be recognized and celebrated, we should strive to maximize flexibility to be able to meet the needs of our communities on their own terms. The arts and heritage sectors should celebrate and promote Toronto's diverse communities and their histories, and the arts should be seen as an important mechanism for telling Toronto's stories and helping us understand ourselves.

Equity – All Torontonians, regardless of age, gender, socio-economic status, language, where they live in the city, etc. should have equal opportunity to engage with the arts. All artists, regardless of organizational history or size, professional status, age, gender, socio-economic status, language, where they live/work in the city, etc. should have equal opportunity to practice their art and receive City support.

Excellence/quality – Toronto's artists and arts organizations should strive for – and receive the support necessary to reach – the highest echelons of artistic achievement.

Travel, touring, continuous practice, business and marketing skills are all recognized and supported as essential elements of the pursuit of excellence.

Inclusivity/Accessibility – The City of Toronto, TAC, and arts/cultural organizations all share the responsibility to remove barriers to artistic and cultural experiences. Exposure to and education in the arts is the most effective way to reach new communities. For many disadvantaged, marginalized or traditionally underserved communities additional resources must be expended to ensure they can benefit from Toronto’s cultural assets.

Innovation – Dare to invest in new ideas and unproven people and concepts.

Transparency – The City of Toronto and TAC should take every effort to communicate clearly how and why the granting process works. As one participant put it, “everyone should understand where, why and how money is allocated.”

Priorities for strengthening Toronto’s arts sector:

Participants are looking to the City and TAC for leadership to create the conditions where the arts and artists can thrive in Toronto. They view increased investment in the arts as an important opportunity to expand supports to the full spectrum of the arts community. Across the spectrum, six consistent, top-line issues were brought forward and emerged consistently in both the City-directed and TAC-directed conversations. Participant suggestions listed below may apply either to TAC or the City, or in many cases to both.

Participants emphasized the need for a range of programs and strategies to support the sector. They recognized the sector is complex, ranging from independent artists to large companies, community groups to creative industries, professional and non-professional artists across all ages and an expanding variety of disciplines. Participants noted that the goals, methods and signs of success for each of these groups differ.

Participants challenged the City and TAC to strike the right balance between the needs of large organizations and small; supporting the concentration of the arts downtown while nourishing the growth of the arts sector in the inner suburbs and suburbs; promoting and celebrating established artists and organizations while sponsoring emerging artists and art forms.

Artists need increased access to space and programs

Toronto needs more affordable, appropriate spaces across the city to produce and present art. Participants, particularly independent artists, those in community arts and those representing smaller organizations, identified affordable space as the most significant barrier they face. Strikingly, participants representing heritage buildings and museums told us their spaces are underused and expressed the strong desire to ‘open the doors’ of their spaces to accommodate a variety of uses. They expressed frustration that regulation prevents them from making their spaces available free of charge for broader public use.

“We need to unlock the institutions, to make Toronto’s buildings as vibrant after hours as they are during the day.”

-Scarborough public meeting participant

Participants espoused the shared goals of improving access to affordable spaces, maximizing use of existing space, opening up non-traditional venues to artistic production or presentation, and animating underused spaces for public benefit. They offered a range of ideas to achieve these ends. Some of their suggestions include:

- Develop an iconic, central, shared space for artists, similar to the MaRS Discovery District
- Bring art into public spaces by curating public art in city-owned spaces. For example, invite select artists to create murals on the inside of City swimming pools
- Take advantage of Toronto’s condo boom to bring artists into these new communities. Partner with developers and condo managers to create an affordable rent program to give artists access to common space in condo buildings.
- Loosen regulations on use of empty space to create the opportunity for artists to gain temporary access to unused commercial or residential space
- Create the opportunity for ‘pop-up art’ by developing a central registry where property owners can list their space for temporary use by artists
- Establish tiered rental rates to connect the cost of renting City space with an organization’s ability to pay
- Create a "Cultural Spaces Database" that lists all of the available space in Toronto, both publically and privately owned

Toronto arts must reflect and celebrate the city’s diversity

Participants noted the power of the arts to reflect the evolving ethnic, linguistic, cultural and socio-economic diversity found across the city. Helping Toronto’s many communities better understand one another, and providing opportunities for cross-cultural communication and shared experience is vitally important to arts sector. Participants praised Toronto as the ideal environment for cross-cultural exchange to create new forms of art and uniquely Torontonians hybrids of cultural expression.

Participants recognized twin challenges that the City and the arts sector can work together to overcome: many communities, demographics as well as many areas of the city are underrepresented in arts organizations and artistic production, and many of these same groups are underserved as audiences and consumers of art. Participants stressed the importance of outreach into underserved and under-represented communities.

“We must go to overlooked communities instead of expecting them to come to us.”

-St. Lawrence Hall public meeting participant

“We know our diversity is our greatest strength as a city, but we need better ways to tell our stories. We need to

cultivate Toronto’s understanding of ourselves.”

-Heritage/museum stakeholder meeting participant

“We need to celebrate and articulate what is uniquely Toronto.”

-Etobicoke public meeting participant

Multi-lingual programming, cross-cultural programming and expanding services to all areas of the city were priorities for many participants. Other ideas included:

- Create a City of Toronto Museum to share Toronto’s stories with other residents, and with the world
- Support programs that explicitly produce cross-community connections
- Work with local communities to develop an inventory of cultural assets in the inner suburbs
- Produce and accept grant applications in multiple languages
- Support programs that explicitly produce intergenerational connections
- Create a grant to subsidize the price of tickets donated to underserved communities
- Make long-term investments in underserved communities to spur the development of the arts sector in all parts of the city
- Create a granting stream to support organizations working to address social issues (eg: health, housing, community building, crime) through art
- Support and promote Neighbourhood Arts Networks as the means to bring art to diverse communities in all parts of the city

Many participants proposed an expanded role for TAC to work with diverse communities to increase production and participation in the arts. Their ideas are included below is the TAC section of this report.

Toronto can raise its game as a Cultural Capital

Participants were deeply proud of Toronto as a vibrant cultural capital, and many identified areas – such as hip hop – where Toronto artists are international leaders as well. Participants viewed increased investment in the arts as an important recognition of the value of the arts to a globally competitive city, but noted much more could be done to fully realize the city’s potential as a cultural capital.

“25\$ per capita is a great accomplishment – but it shouldn’t be. We’re rushing to the middle when we should be leaders.”

-Creative industries stakeholder meeting participant

Participants, particularly from the creative industries, were eager to explore partnerships and attract interest in the arts from the private sector. Participants at all meetings expressed the urgency to “make the case” for continued arts investments among both private and public sectors, as well as among residents. Participants looked to the City and TAC to harness the energy of the arts sector to continue to build political and public buy-in for arts investment, and promote Toronto’s culture.

“Investment in the arts needs to make sense even for voters who don’t participate.”

-Creative industries stakeholder meeting participant

Participants wanted more opportunity to celebrate Toronto's arts and promote the city's artists both locally and abroad. Participants noted the success of events bringing international artists to Toronto, but felt Toronto could do more to increase the exposure of its artists and arts internationally.

“Capital should be for the people of Toronto. We can't get to an international level without the support and love from the City.”

-Etobicoke public meeting participant

“Toronto needs to promote Toronto to itself!”

-St. Lawrence Hall public meeting participant

To raise Toronto's profile as a cultural capital, participants suggested:

- Partner with Tourism Toronto to promote Toronto as a cultural and creative capital. “We see commercials for CN Tower, the Rogers Centre, Niagara vineyards, but not the music scene.”
- Recognize and promote Toronto's music scene, which is larger and more diverse than that of highly reputed Austin Texas
- Develop grants to support international exchanges of artists
- Create travel grants for local artists to gain international exposure
- Create travel grants for local artists to tour within Toronto
- Use the achievement of reaching the \$25 per capita benchmark to mobilize increased investment in the arts from both the private and public sectors
- Create the “Toronto Festival”, similar to Caravan, to be an annual event featuring local artists in all areas of the city. Produce a “cultural passport” to encourage residents to attend Festival events in many areas of the city.

It is vital to improve the living and working conditions for artists and arts workers

Participants lamented chronic under-employment and poor wages of artists and arts workers in the city. Affordable housing and working spaces were seen as part of the solution. Working with foundations, granting agencies, patrons and supporters to improve wages and provide artists and arts workers with a more reliable income was also a priority. Participants condemned the striking difference in average incomes between artists and arts workers and the Toronto average. Some noted the disparity between the highest and lowest paid even within organizations.

“Success to me means never hearing ‘get a real job’ ever again.”

-City stakeholder meeting participant

“Allow artists to earn a living wage.”

-TAC public meeting participant

“I'm happy to receive a project grant, but I'm not allowed to pay myself from that. So I have money to put into my work, but I can't work on my project if I can't afford to live!”

-St. Lawrence Hall public meeting participant

Participants pointed to City evidence that as a sector the arts make a considerable contribution to Toronto's economy. They argued it is in the best interest of all of Toronto to attract and retain artists and arts workers, and that the City can do more to improve the livelihoods of artist and arts workers. Participants were hopeful that increased investment in the arts could have a positive impact on the living and working conditions for artists and arts workers.

Some suggestions to improve the living and working conditions of artists and arts workers included:

- Set an allowable proportion of grant amounts to go to artist fees
- Coordinate internships in the arts to create youth employment, develop job skills, and assist organizations meets their staffing needs
- Develop programs or courses to help artists gain business skills
- Develop programs or courses to help artists learn new and best practice techniques for fundraising in the arts
- Use the achievement of reaching the \$25 per capita benchmark to mobilize increased investment in the arts from both the private and public sectors

Cultivating youth awareness and participation is integral to the sustainability of Toronto's arts sector

“Here's a low-hanging fruit: set the goal for every school-aged child in Toronto to have at least one artistic experience every year.”
- North York public meeting participant

Participants were united in emphasizing the importance of outreach to youth, both in terms of being physically present in the community and active in digital spaces and social networks. Many highlighted the need for meaningful engagement and cultivation of youth as consumers of art. Others stressed the need to provide more opportunities for young people to engage in and develop skills for professional and non-professional artistic practice. Participants unanimously cited youth involvement in the arts as integral to building and sustaining Toronto's cultural capital.

Participants identified three major barriers to greater youth participation in the arts. The first is availability of youth programming. Many participants observed that there simply is not sufficient supply of resources and programs for youth to meet demand. This is especially true in communities outside the core and for youth from low-income families.

The second barrier is insufficient arts education. Many participants pointed to studies demonstrating that adult tastes and habits are often determined based on childhood exposure, and observed that many Toronto youth are simply not receiving adequate exposure to art. Participants from larger organizations pointed to diminished role of art education in the school system, while those representing community organizations noted that many youth from newcomer or low-income families lack the family support or knowledge to introduce them to the arts.

The third barrier pertains to youth seeking to further their artistic practice in both

professional and non-professional streams. Participants cited a lack of information and/or resources for youth to improve their practice, raise sufficient income, and receive the support and mentorship needed to advance. Many participants expressed frustration that many young artists simply do not know about the programs that do exist. They emphasized the importance of “physically getting out into the community” to reach youth who not only do not know where to look for help, but do not know to look for it in the first place.

Participants had many suggestions for increasing youth exposure to and participation in the arts. Many cautioned, however, against inadvertently creating a stigma around programs for youth, particularly youth from underserved communities or at-risk youth. They stressed that “art is about creativity and self-discovery, these programs cannot be politicized”.

Some of the ideas participants furthered to cultivate youth awareness of and participation in the arts included:

- Expanding existing and creating new mentorship programs for young artists to gain access to more experienced artists and arts workers
- Partner with community and neighbourhood associations to increase awareness of established programs in underserved communities
- Partner with community and neighbourhood associations to create new offerings of youth arts programming
- Set and publicize a city-wide goal for all school-aged children to have at least one encounter with professional arts each year
- Develop granting streams for organizations whose primary mandate is youth engagement to offer arts-focused programming
- Partner with Toronto Public Library to create a program wherein equipment for art production can be rented out from Library locations. Offer intermittent workshops for youth about equipment as well as opportunities for youth in the arts.
- TAC & OAC partner with TDSB on “Artists in Schools” Program
- TAC partner with schools to host discussions introducing working artists to Toronto schoolchildren
- Explore partnerships with Toronto Community Housing Corporation to make TCHC space accessible for youth arts programming
- Reexamine the 2-year experience requirement for youth to qualify for professional grants
- Deepen the relationship between TAC and LASOs to mentor young people and raise their awareness of opportunities in the arts
- For best practices, look first to partnerships with organizations already working in this space: Neighbourhood Arts Network, Sketch, Artreach, Community Centres, CUE, and others

Sponsor Risk and Innovation

Most participants advocated for much greater risk taking in funding the sector. They expressed a strong desire for the City and TAC to facilitate and sponsor innovative activities and new ideas and art forms. Many participants perceived TAC and the City to be risk-averse in their approach to funding the arts, and understood scarcity to be the

main cause. Heavy competition for limited funding and accountability pressures created a scenario wherein both TAC and the City privileged predictability and success over experimentation. Participants expressed a cautious optimism that increased investment in the arts in Toronto would allow for increased flexibility for the City and TAC to take greater risks cultivating innovation.

“We need to build our risk tolerance, which means creating the space for a noble failure.”

- City stakeholder meeting

Participants saw youth initiatives, cross-sectoral partnerships, and long-term support for artistic development as areas in which greater risk-taking by granting bodies would have the greatest impact. Specific suggestions included:

- Identify and promote an ‘Urban Dance Belt’
- Provide multi-year funding on a project basis with longer reporting timelines to permit artists and organizations to experiment with an unproven idea
- Allow organizations with operating grants to partner with artists who have received project/individual grants on special projects
- Establish a tiered granting program that begins as a small seed grant for an unproven artist or idea and evolves over time with the artist.
- Create a ‘Big Ideas’ grant that would allow an artist, group of artists or arts organization to receive a larger sum than would typically be granted by the City or TAC in order to execute a major work with major impact of the city. The Big Idea could be awarded to only one applicant per year, or could be a larger sum granted every other year. Publicize the Big Ideas process to promote the arts to residents.

Ranking the Capital Gains priorities

On the whole, participants supported the five priorities outlined in Creative Capital Gains. Ranking the five priorities in terms of their impact on strengthening the arts sector was a difficult activity for most groups. Many groups viewed ‘finance and funding’ as an a priori requirement to achieve gains in the other priority areas. Others found all five priorities equally important, or at least interconnected, with gains in one area naturally supporting gains in the others.

Overall, participants ranked Finance and Funding, Access and Diversity and Cultural Space as the most important priorities for strengthening Toronto’s arts sector. Creative Industry and Creative Capital carried less support among all participants except those working directly in the creative industries. For most participants, Creative Industry and Creative Capital were seen to be outcomes of - as opposed to subjects for - cultural investment.

Advice for Toronto Arts Council

In addition to the suggestions included above, participants offered additional thoughts on the role they would like to Toronto Arts Council to play in strengthening the city's arts sector as well as suggestions for improving TAC processes and programs.

Overall, participants supported Toronto Arts Council Board's 2012 decision to channel all new funds into three broad directions: 50% of new funds towards growing existing programs; 30% of new funds towards youth, diverse and underserved communities, and 20% to innovation, large events and leveraging partnerships. Participants also voiced their approval of the proportion of new funds devoted to each goal.

Participants did, however, have mixed reactions to TAC's definition of the "Innovation" stream for new investment. Most participants liked the idea of reserving some portion of funds specifically for unusual projects, or to use as leverage for other funding bodies. Some argued it is unnecessary to focus on major events such as the PanAm Games or other large, one-time occasions. These participants felt TAC could achieve a more lasting impact on the city through direct and consistent investment in artists.

Still others noted that while the "Innovation" stream is dedicated to being catalyst to attract investment from other funding partners, most truly innovative projects will also be unproven and new, and as such may be the projects least likely to attract private donations or more conventional grants.

Though participants had some reservations about how the "Innovation" stream would be realized, they unanimously supported the goal of taking greater risks on Toronto artists.

Improving the Grant Process

Chronic underfunding was recognized as the major limitation of granting programs and process. Many participants were surprised to learn TAC approved fewer than half the applicants in 2012 and felt strongly that the low approval rate was more reflective of underfunding rather than the quality of applications. Participants did, however, offer many suggestions for how to streamline the application process and ideas for expanded granting programs.

- Change application criteria to allow applicants to qualify for both operating and project grants
- Facilitate opportunities for new applicants to receive assistance from previously-successful applicants
- Reach out to applicants whose grants were denied to explain why they were not successful, particularly youth and those from diverse communities
- Expand the project funding stream significantly, especially for multi-year projects
- Increase the amounts offered by program grants towards matching those offered by Ontario Arts Council/Canada Council for the Arts
- Increase the flexibility of the application process: accept applications in multiple formats (eg: video, multimedia)
- Institute an online application process
- Create a web resource, with corresponding video, for new applicants detailing

- how to apply for a grant and highlighting best practices
- Increase TAC's capacity to respond more quickly to grant applications
- Review grant application requirements with the aim to make the effort and time put in to the grant application more closely correspond to the size of the grant
- Simplify the language of grant application instructions, for all granting streams, but especially for youth and diverse communities
- Create an additional discipline category for practices that do not fall into the established disciplines. Eg: 'multidisciplinary', 'other' or 'new arts'
- Establish a program of 'seed' or 'microgrants' that are smaller, open to unproven artists and have multiple deadline dates throughout the year
- Incorporate 'community connections' as a granting criteria
- Aim to increase the representation of youth, diverse communities and those from outside the downtown on TAC juries and as grant officers
- Create a performance-based program where grant recipients can qualify for a "bonus" grant based on surpassing a set goal, such as tickets sold, revenue generated through alternate fund-raising, number of wards performed in, or artists employed.

An Expanded Role for Toronto Arts Council

Participants appreciated the chance to get together and also to learn about TAC. Most expressed a strong desire to see more similar meetings where artists and arts workers can exchange ideas, discuss issues important to the community, and learn international best practices, and from each other. Most viewed TAC as the natural conveners of these conversations, and envisioned an expanded role for TAC in arts advocacy, education and community outreach. Some specific suggestions included:

- Increase TAC's interaction with communities, especially in underserved communities
- Establish TAC "art scouts" to act similar to sports scouts, searching out undiscovered talent and providing the "on ramp" to greater resources
- Broker private sector partnerships by establishing a "matching grants" program
- Build personal relationships with youth and diverse communities to overcome the intimidation many feel applying for grants
- Provide in person assistance to youth and diverse communities to prepare first-time grant applications
- Develop a professional development series for artists to learn business and operational skills
- Institute a meeting of all grant recipients after awards are announced, to allow recipients to meet one another and exchange projects and ideas
- Encourage greater interaction between TAC and artists between grant deadlines

Many participants also expressed hope that TAC could act to facilitate greater collaboration and partnership within the arts community. TAC's ability to connect artists with one another and encourage exchange of independent/emerging artists with established artists and arts organizations was seen as an untapped resource to the arts sector. Other ideas included:

- Support existing and create new opportunities for the arts community meet and discuss the state of the arts in Toronto
- Introduce organizations/artists with similar interests
- Encourage partnerships to applicants pursuing similar ends, or explore “economies of scale” for artists proposing similar mediums
- Develop shared platforms and services for emerging artists and those without a workspace.

Outcomes of increased investment in the arts

Participants appreciated that the City must be accountable to taxpayers and demonstrate that increased investment in the arts creates value for the residents of Toronto. They were appreciative of previous City research demonstrating that every dollar invested in the arts returns nearly \$18 to the city’s GDP. Participants voiced other economic benefits the city would enjoy as a consequence of increased investment in the arts, including greater numbers of tourists and increased tourist spending, and more cultural spending by residents. Participants also noted many indirect economic benefits of the arts. Participation in the arts has been correlated with numerous social benefits such as diminished rates of criminality among at-risk youth, integration of newcomers in communities and increased cross-cultural understanding, and art participation has been shown to counter the effects of social isolation and even dementia in seniors. Participants noted that increasing residents’ exposure to the arts may decrease the need for City spending in other social areas.

Participants also articulated many goals for Toronto artists that would be realized as a consequence of increased City investment, including: the establishment of an emerging artists collective, greater connection between artists, more paid positions in the arts, higher wages for artists, and more artists and arts organizations working from permanent work spaces.

The input from all ten meetings will be used to inform the City as staff prepare the Cultural Funding Phase-In Plan, to be presented to Council in May 2013 for incorporation in the 2014 budget.