



2022
Canadian Arts Summit

Summary and Key Observations

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Summary and Key Observations

Since 1998, the **Canadian Arts Summit** has annually assembled artistic directors, executive directors and volunteer board chairs of Canadian arts organizations with operating budgets of approximately \$3M and over, to collaborate on ways to strengthen the sector. This year's Canadian Arts Summit took place as a virtual gathering from April 25 to 28, 2022 with 155 senior arts leaders in attendance, hailing from all across the country.

Throughout the Summit, a small team of dedicated arts professionals captured the main ideas from panel discussions and breakout groups. Based on these discussions, they composed a series of **key observations** for how the sector and federal government can work together to rebuild and enrich Canada's arts, culture and heritage communities.

While there were distinct themes for each of the four days of the Summit, we saw recurring topics emerge as crosscurrents throughout the conversations. These included ideas around transforming governance, efforts to decolonize our institutions and concerns about living and working conditions for artists and arts workers.

This summary document was compiled by Robin Sokoloski of Mass Culture, Jacoba Knaapen of the Canadian Arts Coalition, Francis Roy of the Fédération culturelle canadienne française and Aubrey Reeves of Business / Arts. We are pleased to share it as a resource to all the Canadian Arts Summit delegates. Following the conclusion of the National Culture Summit: The Future of Arts, Culture and Heritage in Canada in Ottawa on May 2-4, 2022, we are also pleased to provide it to the Honourable Minister Rodriguez to further inform Creative Industry policy discussions.

Business / Arts



April 25, 2022

Theme 1: Collective Action - Decolonization

Each year, the Canadian Arts Summit tackles a big issue with a commitment to listening to better understand the issue and what it means to communities across the country. In 2022, guided by **Indigenous leaders**, we continued to listen and further our education on what decolonization means to different organizations and communities across the country.

Highlights of Discussions:

- “Decolonization” is a contested term, used in various ways by different people and institutions. At its core are questions of who has authority and agency.
- As a result of their origins, histories and legal structures, cultural institutions are by nature colonial and thus limited in their ability to fight against the phenomenon.
- Sovereignty and self-determination are central conditions for achieving a real discourse of decolonization. These elements need to be complemented by genuine openness and discussion.
- Decolonization is a co-journey led by Indigenous peoples but it is the responsibility of settlers.
- The process of decolonization includes decentering whiteness, decanonizing the western art narrative and indigenizing our institutions. It calls on us to undo modes of seeing and being in our everyday work and lives.
- Artistic and cultural programs and exhibitions are important contributions to public education around decolonization, which will contribute to real change.

Key Observations:

- No progress on decolonization can occur without Indigenous people in decision-making roles (both on boards and management) with real authority.
- Institutions should learn how to bring ceremony into our cultural spaces to care for artists and artworks in a spiritual way.
- Decolonization calls on us to reframe concepts of art ownership and stewardship from an individual to collective responsibility. In doing so, institutions shift from being object-centred to maker-centered.
- Cultural institutions need to make commitments that they will be transparent, open and make their collection accessible to Indigenous nations.

April 26, 2022

Theme 2: The Fleck Address - Organizational Capabilities

VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity) forms the context in which organizations view their current and future state and it sets boundaries for planning and policy management. VUCA sets the stage for managing and leading.

Highlights of Discussions:

- Inequality is at the core of the destabilization and the crisis of legitimacy that our institutions have experienced over the past two years.
- While there are many Board of Directors that are effective, there has been a growing awareness that the traditional board structure is hindering organizational change and growth. Each institution's Board of Directors is unique and "dysfunctional in their own way" thus there is no one-size-fits all solution.
- Many institutions are experimenting with parallel governance and advisory structures including community counsels, artistic advisory circles and fundraising committees. These institutions are benefiting from more voices in their decision-making process and are seeing a movement towards consensus-building. It also engages dedicated high-level volunteers in their specific areas of interest.
- The racial and social-justice reckoning has also evolved into a questioning of working conditions and the live/work balance in the arts. It has fundamentally redrawn our relationships between leaders and workers.
- The climate crisis is not an adjunct to other social issues; any crisis our society faces in the future will be amplified by the effects of climate change.
- Decolonization, social and racial justice and addressing climate change are all collective actions towards system change. Values-driven work requires investment of time for open dialogue within the institution and with communities.

Key Observations:

- Institutions are hobbled in making major changes to governance by legislation and funding structures that require incorporation and traditional board structures. Bill S-216 is a first step; however, funders need to be more open to alternative governance models.
- Governance structures must shift from the current approach of individualized responsibility towards an approach of collective responsibility in tune with different cultures and communities.
- The values of an organization must be clearly defined and integrated into the decision-making process at all levels of the organization. Everyone within the organization must sign-on to those values.

April 27, 2022



Theme 3: Cultural Shifts

During the pandemic, many of our dedicated arts audiences may have found other ways to entertain themselves. In light of this, how does the arts remain relevant and responsive? What is the role of the audience in helping to rebuild the arts? Please see the latest Arts Response Tracking Survey for related data.

Highlights of Discussions:

- Many organizations successfully adapted to digital presentations during the pandemic as a way of continuing to engage their audiences. As time went on, digital programming diminished in appeal to audiences, especially for certain art forms where we value the communal, tactile or sensory experience.
- Everyone stayed home during the pandemic and thought about what really matters to them. Those who deeply value arts and culture (super-fans) showed their commitment as donors and were the first to return to live performances and events. It is occasional arts attendees who feel less urgency to return to the arts. As a result, we will continue to see a slow and gradual rebuilding of attendance to pre-pandemic levels.
- A serious side-effect of COVID has been mental health struggles, most acutely felt among young people. Meanwhile, the pandemic has demonstrated the mental health benefits of the arts and has prompted widespread conversations around the contribution the arts can make to well-being. Our institutions have an opportunity to provide greater access to the arts and create programs that expressly aim to improve the mental health of our constituents and our communities.
- Within institutions, there are worries about the morale and mental health of artists and arts workers. Everyone is struggling with stress, burnout, disconnection, reduced workforces and higher workloads for those who remain.
- Inadequate human resources and the precarity of work has been amplified by the pandemic. Arts workers have lost trust that they can find dependable work.

Key Observations:

- As we rebuild our organizations and audiences, we must also redefine our metrics of success to be principally about serving and forging bonds with our community. Ticket sales will become the outcome of that work, not the goal.
- Acknowledge that the arts sector is still in crisis and the impacts of the pandemic have been traumatic for our sector. Reframe expectations of immediate recovery and continual growth.
- Recognizing the slow return of audiences, we call on the federal government to extend the Tourism and Hospitality Recovery Program.
- As Endowments are dependable sources of funds in times of instability, we call on the federal government Expand the Endowment Incentives Component of the Canada Cultural Investment Fund in two ways:
 - Boost funding to the program to increase the matching fund amount to those performing arts organizations who are already eligible.
 - Create a second stream of the program for art galleries and museums to access the fund.

April 28, 2022



Theme 4: Advocacy

How has Canada's Federal government supported Canada's arts sector and how will they continue their support? How can the arts advocate and plan in times of such uncertainty? The discussion placed an emphasis on the need for structural changes across both government funding models and the arts sector to ensure a stronger social safety net for creative workers.

Highlights of Discussions:

- The pandemic has precipitated a fundamental shift in the way the arts sector has advocated to funders. The sector has presented a data-driven and fact-based picture of our needs, with more leaders from a variety of organizations involved in advocacy.
- There is a growing recognition that we need a coherent narrative of how the arts contribute to a sustainable and healthy future for society. Effective advocacy will involve a unified message from a collaboration of networks.
- An outcome of the pandemic has been greater collaboration across the sector and with other industries to contribute to social and community development. The example of Creative Rebuild NY shows how artists can be embedded into non-arts organizations with a variety of approaches to collaboration.
- There is a tension between the instrumentalist vs. universalist approach to making the case for the value of the arts. Are the arts a public good? Do the arts have to be responsible for other outcomes, i.e. economic, jobs, tourism, mental health?
- The sector has been operating with an out-dated policy architecture. Our current structures and policy frameworks are built upon the Massey Commission. The definition of art and its relationship with Canadian society has fundamentally changed since 1949.
- Pre-pandemic the arts and artists were operating with precarity. Now, the trust has been completely broken that artists can survive. Who is responsible for the well-being of artists?

Key Observations:

- The status of the artist Act (1992), if reviewed, can be a lever to address living conditions of artists. It recognizes the important role of the creator in society and promotes an understanding of the unique manner in which artists work.
- The disruption of the pandemic has created an opportunity to undertake a substantial re-examination of cultural and creative policy in Canada. Such an undertaking should be led by the sector and engage all facets of the government by bringing arts and culture into dialogue with other policy areas such as education, urban planning, health and well-being, taxation, copyright, business models and ownership in a digital work and much more. The time is ripe for a new policy architecture that embraces the rich and complex culture that Canada has become and positions Canadians arts and arts organizations to reach their top potential as international leaders at the forefront of creativity and innovation.