



Recommendations from the Alliance of Arts Councils of Ontario to the Ontario Government

2024 Pre-Budget Consultations

January 31, 2024

We write to you as members of the [Alliance of Arts Councils of Ontario](#) (AACO), a provincially registered not-for-profit organization with more than 30 municipal and regional arts councils, community arts councils and artists' networks from across Ontario. Our pre-budget recommendations are focused on addressing both the short-term needs, as well as continuing to strengthen the foundation for the sector to rebuild, enhance its resiliency, and continue to contribute to the economy in Ontario.

Ontarians Value the Arts, and the Arts are Valuable for Ontario

We know that the people of Ontario care for and value the arts in their communities. In survey after survey, Ontarians demonstrate that they favour provincial support for the arts, believe the arts are important for their quality of life, and see that arts and cultural activities are critical for economic well-being.ⁱ The arts help drive tourism efforts, boost mental health, and help create the conditions that communities need to thrive.

With 81,800 professional artists, Ontario accounts for 40% of all Canadian artists, almost double the number of any other province. There are 370,000 workers in arts, culture, and heritage occupations in Ontario, representing 4.7% of the province's overall labour force, one of the highest proportions in the country.ⁱ

"Overall, the arts, culture, and heritage had a \$14.3 billion direct impact on GDP in the second quarter of 2022, which is 5% higher than in the fourth quarter of 2019 (\$13.6 billion). The impact of culture exceeded its pre-pandemic level for the first time in the fourth quarter of 2021 and has continued to rise since then."ⁱⁱ

We are deeply grateful for the ongoing support the sector has received from the Province of Ontario as we continued to work tirelessly to support local artists generating paid, meaningful work while ensuring that the broader communities and individual sectors were able to lean on the arts for their respective recoveries.

While the sector has stepped up, time and time again, to continue to deliver vital arts programming to our communities and meet its commitments despite rising inflation pressures, we require additional ongoing support. As the rising costs of goods and inflation continue to impact the lives of people in



Canada, the arts sector remains in an incredibly precarious position. We need continued government support in the short term, as well as investments in the long-term sustenance of the sector.

Recommendations

The Alliance of Arts Councils of Ontario is proposing the following five recommendations:

1. Invest an additional \$35M in annual funding to the Ontario Arts Council:

As both inflation and Ontario's population continue to grow, it is critical that the base funding for the OAC grows accordingly. By bringing base funding up to \$95M annually, the OAC can continue to ensure the short - and long-term recovery and success of the arts sector in Ontario. The organization's established and credible processes for disseminating funds, including through the use of peer assessment, should be relied on so that the arts community can ensure the best possible use and maximization of every dollar.

Special funding must be available based on need and quality of performance as restricting support based on budget size disadvantages newer and smaller arts organizations who desperately need assistance.

2. Continue delivering targeted Indigenous, Black, Peoples of Colour and Disability support funding to the OAC

While the one-time funding for the Arts Recovery Support Fund, Indigenous Arts Fund, and Career Catalyst: Project Grants for New Generation Artists was deeply appreciated and helped so many artists reconnect with audiences and work towards recovery, the pandemic continues to have a significant negative impact. We recommend a permanent commitment to these programs. These funds should continue to be designed and delivered through the OAC.

3. Support the Mental Health of Ontarians through the Arts

In post-pandemic times, arts continue to play a major role in the personal and community well-being of Ontarians. In a recent provincial survey entitled [The Arts And The Quality Of Life](#), Ontarians responded on the importance of the arts for their quality of life and mental health, as well as their opinions towards the role of the arts in relation to community, diversity, and identity.

- 80% believe the arts are important for their own quality of life, and 85% believe the same for their community's quality of life.
- 79% of Ontarians believe that the arts are important to their mental health.
- 90% of Ontarians agree that an active local arts scene helps make a community a better place to live, and 82% agree it also helps communities attract businesses.



- 96% of Ontarians believe that engaging children in the arts is important to their overall development. ⁱⁱⁱ

As the pandemic and its impacts continue to be felt by Ontarians, we recommend the government deliver further investments in arts organizations and create a specific program of support for artists and organizations who are delivering programming and support for the mental health of Ontarians.

4. Address Precarity in the Sector by Supporting a Federal Basic Income Guarantee

Sufficient investments to reduce poverty and stabilize precarious workers will result in significantly greater economic contribution and participation, increased innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship while reducing social services spending. Working toward a Federal-Provincial Basic Income partnership will accelerate these trends and will be a necessary strategy to reduce Ontario's deficit, and rebuild the economy.

This should include advocating and working with the Federal Government on the development and implementation of a Basic Income Guarantee; shifting existing provincial income support systems toward Basic Income principles that require less conditionality and provide recipients with more autonomy; and implementing an Ontario Basic Income demonstration program targeting low-income artists, gig-workers, and other precariously employed Ontarians for inclusion.

5. Address the nonprofit cultural human resource crisis to ensure Ontarians have access to equitable cultural experiences.

Allocate funds to support the development of a sector-wide labour force strategy and workforce development plan. The strategy would include promoting careers in nonprofits and creating opportunities for workers to attain in-demand skills. We recommend that the government provide the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) with enough funding and confirm that there are appropriate processes in place to ensure arts and culture organizations can be successful in applying for developmental funding. While we appreciate the creation of the Resilient Communities Fund, it has been difficult for arts and culture organizations to access the Fund and other grants, relative to other sectors.

On behalf of the thousands of artists and arts organizations represented by the Alliance of Arts Council's of Ontario, we remain deeply grateful for the opportunity to submit our recommendations and we urge you to give them priority.



Who We Are

We collectively represent tens of thousands of artists, hundreds of local arts organizations of every size and discipline delivering arts and culture programming and services in their communities, cultural workers and arts groups in every discipline, their volunteers and audiences.

We are dedicated to the ongoing advancement of the sector, and particularly at the moment, to providing projects and initiatives that will ensure a robust post COVID - 19 pandemic recovery and provide the foundation for the sustainable future of the arts and culture sector in the Province of Ontario.

Our immediate priority is to continue to sustain and rebuild our arts communities, our regions, and our province, ensuring ongoing resiliency.

What We Do

AACO is an association of the leaders of the groups outlined above. We meet monthly to share knowledge and information, provide peer support, explore new ideas, organize professional development opportunities, and undertake research and advocacy initiatives that support the health and wellbeing of the arts sector locally and across the province.

Sources

i. <https://statsinsights.hillstrategies.com/p/artists-in-ontario-in-2021>

ii. <https://statsinsights.hillstrategies.com/p/arts-culture-gdp-2022-q2>

iii. <https://www.arts.on.ca/research-impact/research-publications/newsflash-%E2%80%93-the-arts-and-the-quality-of-life-the>

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Alliance of Arts Councils of Ontario:

Algonquin Arts Council
Arts Council - Haliburton Highlands
Arts Council - Windsor & Region
Arts Council of Northumberland
Arts Etobicoke
Arts Network Ottawa / Réseau des arts d'Ottawa
Arts, Culture & Creative Industry Development Agency
Chatham-Kent Arts & Culture Network
Conseil des arts Prescott Russell Arts Council
Electric City Culture Council
Guelph Arts Council
Hamilton Arts Council
Headwaters Arts
Haliburton Highlands Museum
Le Conseil des arts de Hearst
Kingston Arts Council
London Arts Council
Markham Arts Council
Mississauga Arts Council
Arts Council of Northumberland
North Perth Arts and Culture Council
North York Arts
Ottawa Arts Council
Prince Edward County Arts Council
Quinte Arts Council
Scarborough Arts
Scugog Council for the Arts
Smiths Falls and District Arts and Culture Council
Sudbury Arts Council
Toronto Arts Council
Town of Shelburne
Tweed and Area Arts Council
UrbanArts
Wallaceburg and District Council for the Arts
Westport Arts Council
York Region Arts Council
Your Arts Council Cornwall