



REIMAGINE THE ARTS

2021-26 Strategic Plan

What We Heard Report



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des arts
du Canada

Prepared by:



Hill+Knowlton
Strategies

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Executive Summary



Executive Summary

As part of the development of its 2021-2026 Strategic Plan, the Canada Council for the Arts (“the Council”) undertook a broad engagement process with its stakeholders throughout 2020 to learn about the current arts landscape in Canada and what stakeholders think the Council should consider for its upcoming Strategic Plan. The process provided artists and arts organizations, among others, the opportunity to share their views and was designed to ensure a diversity of voices was heard. These included youth, Indigenous peoples, culturally diverse groups, Deaf and disability groups, and official language minority communities, from across Canada, including the North. Input was collected through an online engagement survey tool, a series of dialogue sessions, written submissions, and additional public opinion research.



Other engagement activities led by the Canada Council for the Arts:

- Dialogue sessions with Indigenous stakeholders
- Employee engagement sessions

Current Arts Landscape

The Council's work to advance the arts sector in Canada over the past four years was viewed positively by a majority of participants, and particularly by those who received Council funding during that time. COVID-19 continues to have a negative impact on artists and arts organizations, both financially and operationally, and the Council's efforts to secure government support for artists and arts organizations during the pandemic were praised.

COVID-19 has amplified many issues affecting the arts sector, including what some participants consider gaps in funding, particularly with respect to access to core funding. The current landscape has created significant financial difficulties for many artists, organizations and venues who lost other sources of revenue during the pandemic, and they are looking to the Council to help the arts sector through challenges now and recover once the pandemic is over.

Uneven access to broadband internet, insufficient compensation for artists whose work is distributed digitally, and a lack of rehearsal and performance venues, particularly in rural, remote and northern communities, are seen as other key issues. Concerns about health and safety, the closure of venues, and the cost of attending arts events are seen as major barriers to access and engagement with the arts over the next five years.

Top Priorities for consideration in the New Strategic Plan

The Council should do more to help the arts sector demonstrate its relevance to Canadians and increase accessibility to the arts. Participants want the Council to support the arts sector in promoting social activism and social justice, with additional funding to combat racism and address diversity and inclusion issues affecting the arts sector, including for training and strategic and policy development. The Council should encourage increased representation of Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) individuals in leadership positions in the sector and support mentorship and professional development opportunities. Particular attention should be paid to rural and remote locations, to support diversity initiatives and official language minority communities.

One of the clearest recommendations to emerge from these consultations is for the Council to enhance and strengthen its role as a facilitator and advocate for the arts sector. This should include bringing institutions and artists together to share resources and expertise; rewarding collaboration; matching institutions with philanthropists based on interest and focus; and helping arts organizations hold more fundraising events online. Many participants see the Council as a powerful champion and national voice for the arts with governments, the media and the public, building public awareness and support for the arts, and encouraging people to return to live arts once it is safe to do so. They want the Council to use its influence with the federal government to encourage the establishment of a permanent Universal Basic Income, changes to broadcasting and

telecommunications regulations to better contribute to Canadian cultural production and infrastructure, and universal broadband access across the country.

Engagement participants want the Council to promote flexibility and agility in the arts sector, both through its own funding activities and by encouraging innovation and diversity in recipients' business models. Organizations need Council support to try new things or reinvent themselves. Adequate core and long-term funding would make artists and organizations more sustainable and better able to experiment and innovate. The process for applying for grants should be improved and simplified, with grant writing coaches provided by the Council to help people with their applications. Juries should be educated about the unique situations of rural and remote communities to better understand the challenges they face.

More support is needed for emerging artists, especially youth and those in rural, remote and northern communities, as well as emerging arts organizations. Consideration should be given to supporting amateur artists the way Sports Canada supports amateur athletes. Mentorships and apprenticeships would help young people entering the sector and startup organizations. Arts administrators and technical directors would benefit from additional professional development programs. Artists need training to better understand the rapidly evolving arts landscape, including their rights when their work is shared digitally. Support for digital innovation should be an important part of the new Strategic Plan, with a focus on making digital transformation sustainable.

The Council should increase its support for the arts sector in the North, including having representatives on the ground to help build relationships and provide in-person support to people and organizations seeking to access grant programs. It should also recognize that each northern territory is unique with its own specific challenges to be considered. The Council should help the North establish additional rehearsal and performance venues. Specific travel funding for northern artists and events should recognize higher travel and shipping costs in the region. The Council should make it easier for people in the North to apply for grants through the simplification of forms, more translation of materials into Inuktitut, and the use of grant writing coaches to help people who may not put the emphasis on the written word. Mentorship between older and younger generations should be supported.

The Council is very pleased that so many people took part in this engagement process, many for the first time, despite the unprecedented challenges caused by COVID-19. The comments and suggestions received will help guide the Council as it develops its new Strategic Plan, which will ensure that the Council continues to be a strong supporter and advocate for Canada's arts sector in the years to come.

The background of the image is a wall covered in various artworks. At the top left, there's a dark abstract painting with a white circle containing an exclamation point. Next to it is a bright yellow abstract painting with a face-like shape. To the right, there are more abstract paintings in red and black. Below these, there are sketches on a white surface, including a profile of a person's head and a figure in a dynamic pose. The text 'Project Overview' is overlaid on a blue rectangular background in the center of the image.

Project Overview



Project Overview

Purpose

The development of the 2021-26 Strategic Plan provides the Council with an opportunity to engage with stakeholders on how it can help address the wide range of emerging issues affecting the arts sector, and Canadian society more broadly. In addition to funding and sustainability-related challenges raised by artists and arts organizations, the Council is considering what role it can play in issues such as truth and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples; climate change; equity, diversity and inclusion; youth engagement and next generation leadership; raising the international profile of Canadian arts; and the social impact of the arts.

Methodology

Originally conceived prior to the emergence of COVID-19, the engagement activities were adapted to meet health requirements and travel restrictions (for example, no in-person engagement sessions). The scope of the engagements was also expanded to allow the Council to gain insight into how artists and the arts sector have been affected by the pandemic.

The activities were designed to reach out to and meaningfully gather input from the Council's diverse stakeholders from across the country. In addition to hearing from artists and arts organizations and the variety of stakeholders who help sustain the arts sector, the Council aimed to bring in new and more diverse voices.

Stage One – Choicebook™

The first stage of the engagement process allowed the Council to connect with its stakeholders and other Canadians and gather a diversity of perspectives, insights and ideas on the arts and arts practices, the arts sector, the role of the Council and other various priorities and emerging issues, including COVID-19.

An interactive online engagement hub provided a diversity of stakeholders with information on the Council, the strategic planning process, and the opportunity to engage with the Council. It hosted a variety of engagement tools and activities, including Hill+Knowlton's (H+K's) proprietary Choicebook™ engagement survey tool, which is designed to gather informed and considered input from participants, rather than top-of-mind opinion. The hub also included an open-submission tool and contact information.

Findings from the first stage of the engagement process were used to inform the development of the second stage, with the aim of building on issues identified as priorities for deeper discussion.

A total of 6,122 people responded to the Choicebook™, which also gathered key demographic and profile data from participants, such as gender, age, official language, province/territory, ethnicity, urban/rural location, stakeholder group, and experience/familiarity with the Council (including whether any Council funding had been received within the past three years). The survey was open from July 14 to August 21, 2020.

Most respondents to the Choicebook™ reside in urban areas (69%), followed by rural (14%) and suburban areas (12%). Only one percent reside in a remote area. Three in five (59%) self-identified as “White”, 5% as “Indigenous” and 19% as “Other” (17% did not self-identify). For those who indicated their gender, half (49%) were women and just under one-third (31%) were men. Three-quarters (77%) said they are not a member of an official language minority group, while 7% said they are anglophones in Quebec and 5% are francophones outside Quebec. Just under half (48%) self-identified as “artist”, with the next two largest self-identifications being “arts organization staff member” (15%) and “arts enthusiast” (14%). Almost one-third (31%) of respondents had received Council funding within the past three years.

Stage Two – Dialogue Sessions

The second stage was originally intended to take place between May and September/October 2020, although this was delayed slightly by COVID-19. Prior to the pandemic, H+K had planned to hold a series of in-person community dialogues. Travel restrictions and health protocols meant these in-person sessions were replaced with online engagement sessions, which took place November 2-5, 2020.

All dialogue sessions were bilingual, with one session pertaining specifically to the North. ASL/LSQ (American Sign Language/Langue des signes québécoise) interpretation was provided for each session, and Inuktitut interpretation for the northern session. Each session was led by a facilitator from H+K and attended by a note-taker to capture key points of discussion. The Director and CEO of the Council, Simon Brault, introduced each session and was joined by other Council staff to present key information and to observe the discussion. The sessions brought together a mix of key stakeholders, following open invitations to participate.

The aim was to engage artists, arts organizations, groups and collectives from across various regions of Canada. Participants included representation of youth, Indigenous peoples, culturally diverse groups, Deaf and disability groups, and official language minority communities, as well as National Arts Service Organizations (NASOs) and other arts service organizations. A total of approximately 200 participants attended the dialogue sessions, most of whom had received Council funding at some point in the past three years. In addition, 23 written submissions were received from stakeholders, providing detailed input and recommendations for the Council to consider.

Stage Three – Public Opinion Research

To complement the input gathered through the survey and dialogue sessions, H+K conducted public opinion research via an omnibus survey with youth (18-34) and culturally diverse populations who were asked about current issues they feel the Council should address or support through its programs and initiatives. The total sample size was 1,002 respondents.

H+K collated all of the information from the Choicebook™ responses, dialogue sessions, written submissions and the additional public opinion research and summarized the findings in this report, which will be used by the Council in developing its 2021-26 Strategic Plan. Detailed information is provided in the appendices to this report.

In addition to the engagement activities led by H+K, the Council conducted a series of dialogue sessions with Indigenous stakeholders and experts on the topic of decolonizing arts funding. Three sessions took place from November to December. Two sessions were in English, with one pertaining to the North, and one session was held in French. The findings from those consultations are not included in this report.

Through the summer of 2020, the Council held a series of dialogue sessions with its staff, exploring topics affecting the arts sector, including climate change, sustainability, and anti-racism, etc. Staff shared their insights on the state of the arts sector, and ideas on where the Council can make an impact.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council participated in numerous dialogue sessions and roundtables within the arts sector. Though not led by the Council, numerous issues, insights and ideas raised by stakeholders through these sessions were noted by Council staff and will inform the Council's planning and decisions.

Findings



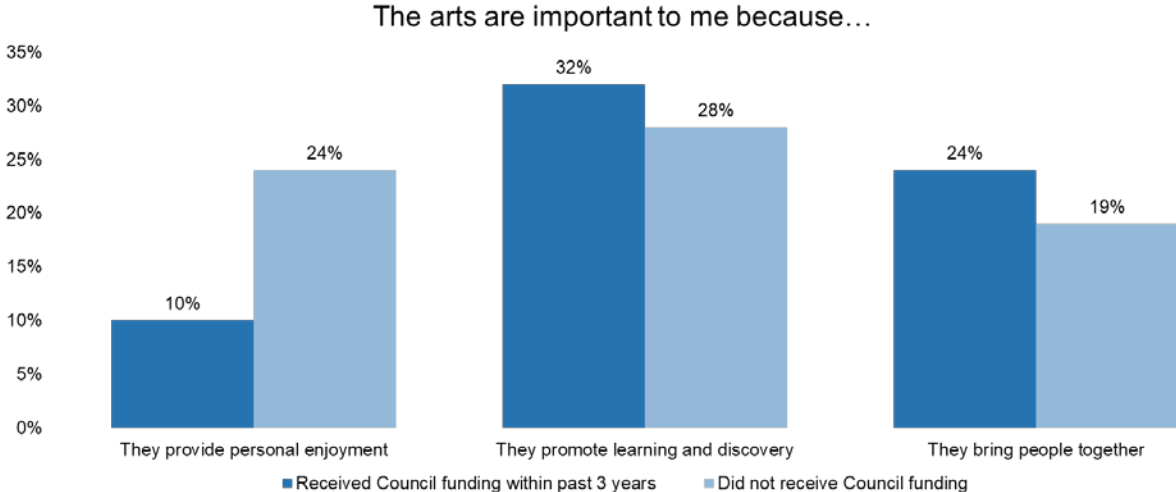
Findings

What We Heard: Current Arts Landscape

The Value and Meaning of Art

Some participants expressed the belief that COVID-19 had made the public more aware of how important the arts are to social well-being, which could help support the need for continued and strong public funding for the arts in the post-COVID period. On the other hand, some participants suggested that prior to the pandemic, many people thought the arts were “special interest” and “elitist”, only accessible to those who can afford them.

For survey respondents¹ who expressed an opinion about why art is important to them, more than a quarter (28%) say the main benefit is to promote learning and discovery, followed closely (24%) by personal enjoyment. About one in five (19%) say art helps bring people together, and 12% say it helps them connect with their personal identity and culture, including 33% of Indigenous respondents. One in 20 say art is important because it promotes diverse cultures internationally (6%) and makes an economic contribution to society (5%). Those who received Council funding at some point in the past three years are more likely to see art as a way to promote learning and discovery (32%) and a way to bring people together (24%), but much less likely (10%) to consider personal enjoyment its principal benefit.



¹ Figures provided throughout this report for survey respondents reflect the percentage of those who expressed an opinion for a particular question, not the percentage of overall respondents.

Making Art

Several participants noted inadequate core funding as a major sustainability challenge. Some organizations try to augment their operational and administrative funding by pursuing additional project grants, but the constant funding applications can distract from actually producing art or lead to overworked artists and staff, resulting in burnout. This is a particular problem for solo artists and others who lack infrastructure support. A concern was raised about challenges in getting funding distributed fairly across the country, notably for official language minority artists and those living outside major urban centres.

Many communities in Canada, especially those in rural, remote and northern parts of the country, lack adequate broadband internet service to effectively operate online. This severely limits their ability to present their work, take part in online discussions or collaborate with others in making art.

Arts organizations are finding it difficult to find qualified replacements for technical directors who retire or otherwise leave the sector, leading to upward pressure on salaries due to intense competition for candidates. This in turn puts additional strains on operational resources of those organizations.

When asked to identify significant barriers to making art over the next five years, nearly two-thirds (63%) of survey respondents cite generating revenue from art activities and just under half (45%) are concerned about the ability to access public funding. Quebec respondents in particular are concerned (59%) about accessing public funding. Other significant barriers that were identified include a decline in audiences due to COVID-19 and other factors (51%), insufficient private-sector funding (25%) and systemic discrimination, including accessibility barriers (23%). Nearly one-third (31%) of respondents who have received Council funding in the past three years see systemic discrimination as a significant barrier.

Experiencing Art

Much of the discussion on this topic was about improving accessibility to art in Canada. It was pointed out that many Canadians cannot access some higher-level traditional arts due to the cost. A participant praised their local orchestra for holding several performances in parks that everyone could attend prior to COVID-19. The initiative helped the orchestra attract hundreds of new donors after the pandemic hit, demonstrating that the public will support accessibility activities like this.

Digital distribution was also an issue for many participants, including musicians who said music presentation had changed dramatically, with many artists unaware of their legal rights when their work is used online. The replacement of live performance with digital sharing has led to a “notable” loss of royalty income for composers and performers who are struggling with incomplete or conflicting information about whether and how they can collect royalties from digital platforms. It was pointed out that the

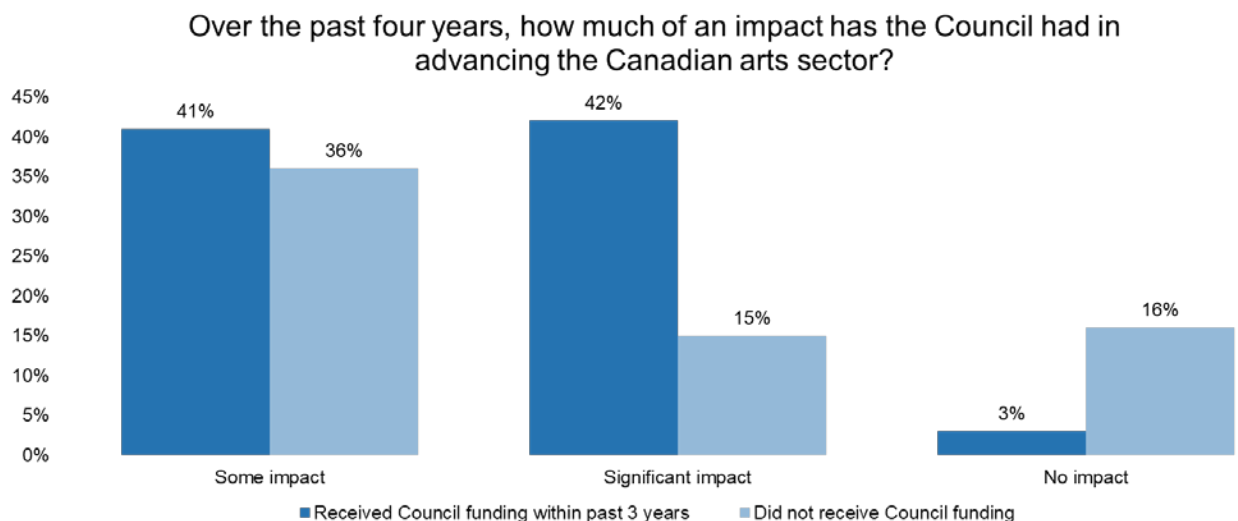
companies benefitting the most from digital distribution are the “FAANG” (Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix, Google), but they do not contribute financially to Canadian artists as traditional broadcasters and telecommunications companies do, thereby negatively affecting Canadian cultural sovereignty.

Canada does not have enough performance venues, especially in rural, remote and northern communities. There are too few venues run by BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) administrators and dedicated to BIPOC artists, making it difficult for them to be properly represented within the Canadian arts scene.

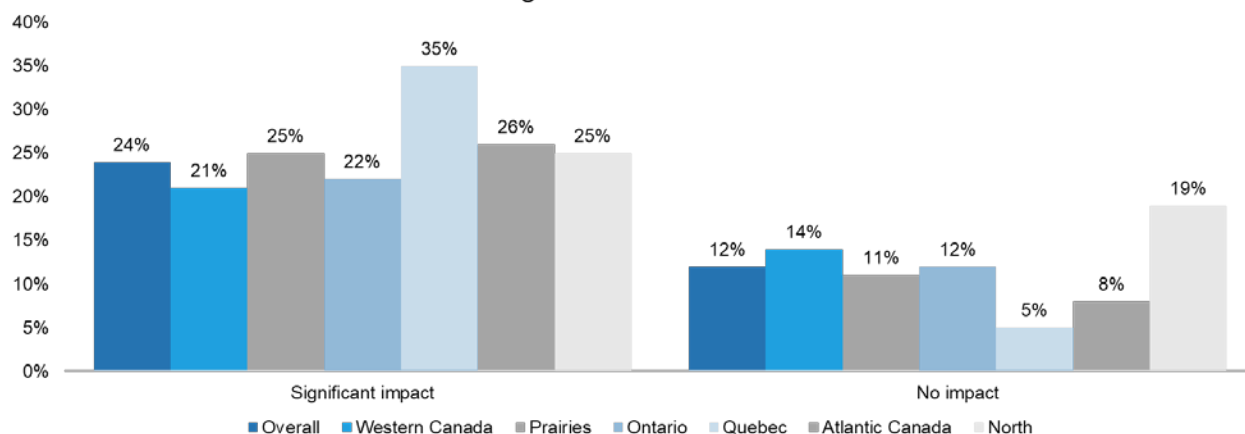
Over half of survey respondents believe health and safety concerns (55%) and the closure of venues (54%) will be significant barriers to access and engagement with the arts in Canada over the next five years. Just under half (47%) believe the cost of attending will also hinder access and engagement.

Current Impact of the Council

Overall, almost two-thirds (62%) of survey respondents believe the work of the Council over the past four years has helped advance the arts sector in Canada, with a quarter (24%) who see the impact as “significant,” including a third (35%) of respondents from Quebec. Among those who received Council funding within the past three years, 83% view the Council’s impact on the arts sector as positive, with 42% who consider it as significant. One in eight overall respondents (12%) say the Council has had no impact, with that percentage rising to 24% among Indigenous respondents but dropping to just 5% among those from Quebec.

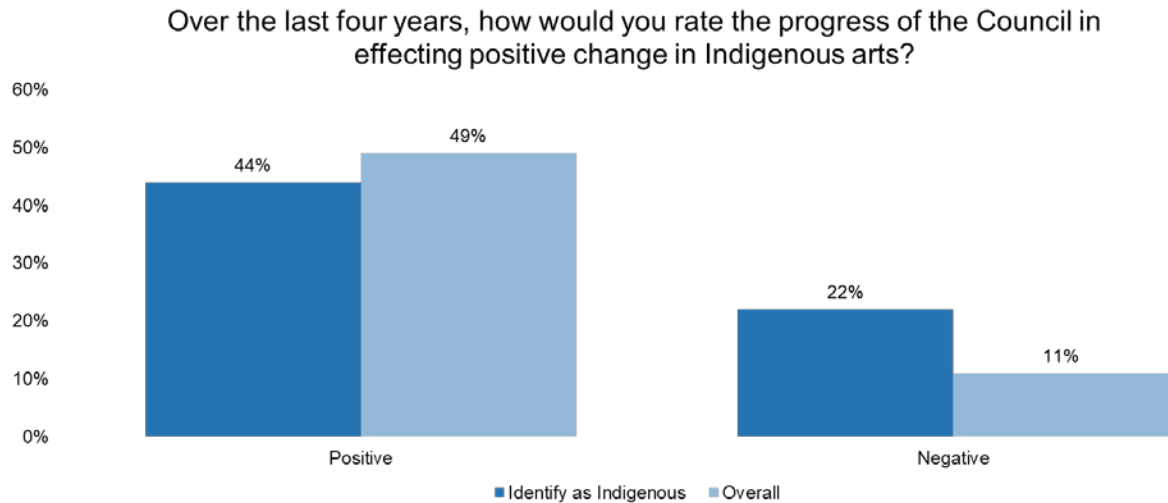


Over the past four years, how much of an impact has the Council had in advancing the Canadian arts sector?



One participant described the Council’s work to address racism and sexism in the arts as “phenomenal.” Another cited many gains over the past five years for those working within the Deaf and Disability Arts, due in part to the Council’s increased involvement in and support for those communities. This was highlighted by the integration of Deaf and Disability Arts applicants into all funding streams. Half (49%) of funding recipients and one-third (33%) of overall survey responses say the Council has effected positive change on improving equity in the arts sector, but one in five (21%) say that impact has not been enough.

During the pandemic, the *Community Cares: Emergency Response Fund for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Individuals Working in the Arts* initiative was recognized for working with Indigenous Arts Services Organizations as delivery agents for resources, with COVID-19 emergency funding (Phase 2) addressing other marginalized groups as well. Half of overall respondents (49%), and 44% of Indigenous respondents, identified Indigenous art as an area where the Council is seen to have effected positive change, while one in nine (11%) of overall respondents and roughly one in five (22%) of Indigenous respondents say the Council’s impact has been insufficient or highly insufficient. Just under half (46%) of overall respondents, and 71% of those who received Council funding within the past three years, say the Council has had a good or excellent impact on supporting the arts under its current Strategic Plan.



Stakeholders provided feedback on the Council’s operations as they relate to delivering the commitments of the current strategic plan. While the Council’s efforts to reduce its administrative costs were welcomed, some expressed concern this has led to a lack of resources that has slowed down the Council’s ability to communicate information clearly to stakeholders or deal with correspondence in a timely manner. A stakeholder submission said the move from discipline-specific juries to cross-disciplinary juries has been harmful to the assessment process and that introducing standing committees to the peer assessment process, while intended to provide greater continuity, has not had a positive effect. Another said the current profile validation process is not being administered equitably.

The State of the Arts in the North

Many of the issues facing arts organizations across Canada are amplified in the three northern territories, as well as other isolated regions in Canada, due to their remoteness and lack of adequate arts infrastructure.

Provincial and territorial funding for artists is less than what is available to their peers in the South. The competitive nature of applications for Council funding, language barriers encountered by many northern applicants, and limited internet connectivity leave northern artists at a disadvantage to those from the South.

Compounding the problem is that costs are much higher in the North due to its isolation from the rest of Canada and the vast distances between northern communities. This means higher travel costs, higher shipping costs, and a higher cost of living in general. For example, one participant noted it can cost as much as \$1,500 to fly on a small carrier from a remote community to a larger centre to catch a connecting flight to a southern city. There are similarly high costs for shipping equipment, gear and supplies across the North, and for artist travel within the region. This can very quickly use up any travel funds made available as part of an artist’s grant.

There is a lack of arts infrastructure in the North, especially in isolated or remote communities. This includes performance and exhibition venues, rehearsal space and even music stores. Many communities have to rely on small spaces that are available, including living rooms, to create new work.

One northern participant explained how poor internet service had forced them to repeatedly postpone plans for a virtual festival because artists could not upload their recordings to Google Drive and eventually had to put the recordings on USB sticks and send them via Canada Post.

Impact of COVID-19 on the Arts Sector

Participants agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic has had, and continues to have, a very negative impact on the arts sector in Canada, both financially and operationally. Artists have been unable to perform or exhibit, rehearsal and performance venues have had to close, and private donations and other fundraising activities have been curtailed. As one individual noted, the pandemic caused many critical issues to arise much faster than they otherwise would have, leaving many in the arts sector unprepared to cope with so many issues simultaneously. It also highlighted the insufficient operating capacity of many organizations and artists, a situation exacerbated by landlords who have not provided rent relief to artists and arts organizations.

Travel restrictions and quarantine requirements have severely disrupted the sector, with many in-person events postponed, reduced in scope or cancelled, further impacting the bottom line. Regional and rural arts venues have been particularly hard hit. Where possible, events have been moved online, both to continue to earn some income and to continue creating art and engaging with the community. Some organizations have been able to hold virtual fundraising events.



“Many arts organizations are very concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on their operations, how they will survive this crisis, the timelines for reopening and the assistance they will need to reassert themselves, including the provision of safe spaces and the promotion of the arts to the public.”

– Stakeholder submission

Another participant expressed concern that, while arts organizations have a decent chance of getting through COVID-19, many who work in the arts sector are leaving the industry with little hope or intention of returning when things become closer to normal.



“I have a hard time imagining a high school grad coming out of school, looking at the devastated arts sector and saying to themselves, ‘Boy, I want to be involved with that professionally!’”

– Dialogue session participant

Future Strategic Plan



Future Strategic Plan

Top Priorities for consideration in the New Strategic Plan

A key priority should be to help the arts sector demonstrate its relevance to Canadians, both through the issues it addresses and in ensuring the arts are accessible to as many people as possible. The Council should support the arts sector in promoting social activism and social justice, and it should encourage and support actions that address racism and promote inclusion and diversity. It should also provide new programs to support BIPOC arts professionals at all levels.

A common theme among participants was the need for the Council to support sector recovery and sustainability by encouraging innovative initiatives and diversity in the arts sector. COVID-19 has forced many organizations to think outside the box, and this should continue even after the pandemic is over.

Support for digital transformation, with a particular focus on making it sustainable, should continue in the new strategic plan. The Council should support efforts to improve internet access across Canada so artists and arts organizations can reap the benefits of digital investments and rapidly expanding online opportunities.

The Council should play a larger facilitation role to bring institutions and artists together to share expertise and resources, and to develop programs that reward collaboration. It should also be a champion and powerful advocate for the arts with governments, the media and the public to build awareness and support for the arts and arts funding, including for a permanent Universal Basic Income that would provide artists with social security to pursue their careers.

Youth who took part in the public opinion research identified diversity and inclusion (36%), climate change and environmental sustainability (26%) and gender equality (25%) as the most important priorities for the Council, followed closely by anti-racism and the stability and survival of the arts sector (24%). Culturally diverse respondents identified anti-racism (35%) and diversity and inclusion (35%) as most important for the Council to support through its programs and initiatives.

Support Transformation and Sustainability

The Council should support organizations to experiment with new things or to reinvent themselves. It was suggested the Council hold workshops on the creation of new models in the arts sector that could help organizations rebuild themselves for the future. National Arts Service Organizations should be recognized and supported for the role they play, especially in times of reconstruction.

Participants want to see flexible and agile funding by the Council, with one noting that it is impossible to be innovative or experimental if all of your money is tied to pre-defined

funding programs and structures. More core and long-term funding would improve sustainability within the arts sector by reducing the precarious financial situation many individuals and organizations find themselves in. Several people endorsed cooperative arts models as another way to improve sustainability.

There was general agreement that the process for applying for grants should be improved. Many people find the process too difficult and time consuming, and those living in rural, remote and northern communities have even more difficulty completing their applications due to limited internet access. One suggestion that was widely supported was for the Council to provide grant writing coaches to help people with their applications. Another was for the Council to have a dedicated position on staff to help new applicants navigate the application process.

A recent member of a peer assessment committee pointed to the need to educate juries about the unique situation of rural communities, to help them better understand challenges related to geography, internet connectivity and limited arts support in those places when deciding on funding applications. This would be similar to the way juries are given briefs about the different considerations related to various demographics such as Indigenous peoples and people with disabilities.

While much of the discussion focused on funding, one participant wanted to highlight the important role the Council plays in recognizing Canadian artists through annual awards that shine a light on Canadian achievements in the arts.

Be a Leader and Facilitator

A common theme was the need for the arts to demonstrate their relevance to some of the bigger issues facing society today, including social justice, climate change and education. It was suggested the Council invest in research around the social impact of the arts and work with organizations on developing and strengthening that impact.

Throughout the engagement process, there was considerable discussion about the Council's role as a champion and powerful advocate for the arts with governments, media and the public, to build public awareness and support for the arts and arts funding, to support and advocate for the fair remuneration of artists, and to encourage Canadians to return to the live arts once it is safe to do so and pandemic restrictions are lifted.

Many participants consider the Council an ally and partner that can play a very useful role in bringing institutions and artists together to share resources and expertise and rewarding them for collaborating. Another suggestion was to establish a fund to support organizations with technical capacity to help those in need of assistance, such as a production centre helping a community-based organization without technical resources.

Several participants called for the Council to be seated at decision-making tables as a national voice for the arts on a variety of topics, including broadcasting policy, royalty agreements and copyright. Participants wanted the Council to use its influence with the federal government to encourage changes to broadcasting and telecommunications legislation and regulations so the FAANG companies are taxed in a way that contributes to Canadian cultural production and infrastructure. They also want it to amplify the voices of those calling for universal broadband access across the country.

The Council received much praise for its interventions with the federal government to ensure emergency funding support for artists and arts organizations during the pandemic, and many participants are looking to the Council to help the sector recover once the pandemic is over. Participants also want it to urge the establishment of a permanent Universal Basic Income once emergency funding ends so people already in the arts can continue doing their work through challenging times and those wanting to join the sector can have the security to take that risk.



“Support the extension and adaptation of the Federal Government’s [Employment Insurance] and the [Canada Recovery Benefit] program, including the development of a basic income program, ensuring equitable dignity and quality of life for all those struggling with economic instability.”

– Stakeholder submission

Some participants called on the Council to play a leadership role in supporting and encouraging arts organizations to bring their wages up to a good standard across all roles. One participant suggested the Council consider emulating a recent provincial capital grant process in British Columbia that asked applicants to identify how many jobs would be created that paid above or below \$30 per hour.

Other suggestions included the Council playing a more direct role in helping organizations advocate with provincial/territorial/municipal governments and the private sector to obtain additional resources; supporting the development of policies within commissioning and programming organizations to ensure music creators receive sufficient compensation in the digital environment; and conducting research or issuing a position paper to support efforts by creators and publishers who are adversely affected by current copyright rules.

Champion Diversity, Inclusion, and Anti-racism

The Council was urged to do more to address racism, diversity and inclusion issues that affect the arts sector, primarily through additional funding for training resources, and by defunding organizations that do not provide safe and inclusive environments. It was pointed out that the Council’s current activities promoting diversity, equity and inclusion

do not necessarily address racism. Another participant said more clarity is needed when it comes to the language used (e.g., pluralism, diversity, inclusion) and suggested a glossary of terms would be helpful.

Organizations looking to become more diverse and inclusive should be able to receive funding support from the Council for their strategic and policy development. Mentorship and professional development should be offered to senior leaders of more established organizations to help them better understand equity and inclusion, and how to connect the work of the organization to the current social climate.



“We strongly request the introduction of new programs that will support the development of BIPOC arts professionals at all levels within the visual arts ecology, but especially in high level leadership roles in art galleries and museums across Canada.”

– Stakeholder submission

There should be increased representation of BIPOC individuals in leadership positions in the industry, both in management and on boards. There were also calls for the Council to promote changes in overall board governance to go beyond simply requiring a certain number of BIPOC directors. Mentorships and professional development should be offered to emerging BIPOC leaders, possibly through long-term (1-2 years) mentorships with current cultural leaders to develop skills and sector knowledge and facilitate knowledge transfer.

It was suggested that organizations receiving operating funds from the Council be required to invite BIPOC and racialized artists into leadership positions in those organizations, even if only for one project, so they can gain experience. Another suggestion was for funding of paid apprenticeships for diverse individuals coming from secondary and post-secondary educational institutions who might not be aware of career opportunities in the arts sector, so they can engage with professional artists and learn more about the industry. The Council should also look at how it can support diversity and inclusion initiatives within arts organizations in rural and remote locations, where there might be few BIPOC individuals in the community.



“We call for a clear commitment by Council to aggressively and decisively defund organizations who do not adopt policies for inclusive and safe work environments with diversified leadership, or who treat adoption of such policies as a fig leaf without any meaningful implementation or accountability to the communities they serve.”

– Stakeholder submission

A stakeholder who works extensively in the disability arts community welcomed Council funding priorities that are helping to support the community but said more should be done to include representatives from the Deaf and disability arts in policy and decision making. Better access provisions are needed for Deaf or blind people to serve on juries, as currently there is no accommodation to allow them to access various media, including video.

Official language minority stakeholders welcomed the important work the Council has done to increase understanding the needs of artists who come from official language minority communities. That said, some organizations in smaller communities feel they do not always fit the criteria set by the Council even though they are ensuring art and culture are present in their communities and have an important role in artistic development. One participant called on the Council to examine its funding methods toward linguistic minorities, including reconsidering the definition of “excellence.” The Council is called upon to play a leadership role in helping to shape a cultural vision throughout the country.

Nurture New and Developing Artists

Several participants encouraged the Council to do more to support and encourage emerging artists, particularly youth and those living in rural, remote and northern communities. Suggestions included creating separate project funding for new applicants and an entry-level grants program for emerging artists and arts organizations.

The Council was encouraged to address the current funding gap for performing arts organizations serving amateur artists, including musicians, singers and those in their development years. It was suggested the Council follow the example of Canadian Heritage’s investment in Sports Canada, which has had a positive effect on the development of the next generation of Canadian athletes and which has raised the importance and availability of amateur sports activities for all. Similar Council funding for grassroots arts organizations serving amateur artists would help to recognize the value of arts for all and the importance of the sustainable development of professional artists.

Train and Educate

Mentorships and apprenticeships were seen as particularly beneficial for young people entering the sector and for startup organizations looking at various business models and exploring business development. A caution was expressed, however, that a need for increased training and mentorship among BIPOC artists and administrators should not be used as an excuse to delay improving diversity and inclusion in the arts sector.

More support for professional development for arts administrators and technical directors to improve their skills and network with their peers would help to improve retention and job satisfaction, and advance inclusion efforts.

Those looking to enter arts management face significant difficulty as there are not enough programs in arts administration available at post-secondary institutions in Canada, unlike in the United States where several programs exist. The Council could foster mentorship opportunities for new and aspiring managers as well as those who want to become independent managers. Additional executive management training would also improve the ability of Canadian arts executives to engage with their international peers.

The pandemic forced artists and arts organizations to deal with a variety of urgent issues, such as employment law, human rights and contract negotiations simultaneously, with many struggling to cope. They often did not have sufficient expertise internally and their limited operational funding meant they could not engage outside experts to help them. The Council could help address this through a combination of core funding and technical assistance and training. Similar assistance is needed to help organizations prioritize the mental health of their employees and contractors, especially with the additional emotional and psychological challenges many people are feeling because of COVID-19. This could be in the form of a designated fund for mental health initiatives, an emphasis on mental health policies in organizational plans, and project or core funding to allow performing artists to partner with mental health and suicide prevention organizations.

Make Digital Transformation Sustainable

Several participants highlighted the need to make digital transformation more sustainable and adjust business models to take account of the systemic changes that digital expansion has created. For example, one participant foresees the extensive use of digital technology within the sector to soon require arts organizations to have digital technologists on staff.

Support for digital innovation is seen as an important part of the new Strategic Plan. COVID-19 has forced artists and arts organizations to pivot in ways they could have never imagined and to a timeline much shorter than they could have expected in order to deliver their programs and exhibit their art or perform virtually. The pivot was fast for artists and arts organizations to use digital tools primarily to engage with supporters and to raise funds. The Council was encouraged to do more to help the arts sector close the digital divide, including advocating with governments to improve digital access in underserved parts of the country.



“I live in a rural community where internet service is as unreliable and changeable as the weather. In this digital age, it puts those of us who are living in these circumstances at a huge disadvantage.”

– Stakeholder submission

Increase Infrastructure and Connections

Many people still present and experience art in non-digital ways, and that means there is still a need for brick-and-mortar venues, including dedicated venues for BIPOC artists and communities to increase diversity and inclusion. Engagement participants had various ideas about how the Council could help, including by investing directly in venues and training centres or by establishing programs that would allow artists to acquire real estate, such as a mortgage loans program and starter financing for capital campaigns.



“We need BIPOC spaces. I’m talking about dedicated organizations with representation present.”

– Dialogue session participant

Several participants called for additional promotional assistance through increased marketing budgets, funding for visiting artists and curators to travel abroad, and the holding of commercial art fairs and international exhibitions. It was suggested the Council introduce a cultural diplomacy grant to help Canadian artists contribute to the international environment.

Noting the growing role of digital technology to art exhibition and marketing, one participant suggested the Council consider providing an online platform for Canadian artists to publish their work and sell to the public.

Disruptions caused by COVID-19 prompted some participants to urge the Council to prioritize programs that provide public access to art that proved popular during lockdowns, such as those allowing artists to share their works with the education and library sectors. An existing program funded by the Council to get writers and their works into public venues and classrooms was cited as something that demonstrates the demand for and value of artists’ work, although additional funding is needed to meet the increased demand and to build on the value of this popular initiative.

Role of the Council in the North

Recognize Uniqueness

While many issues are common throughout the North, participants stressed that Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and Yukon are very distinct. The Council should not treat the North as a single, homogeneous region but engage with each territory about its own specific challenges and needs. At least one participant urged the Council to also recognize the unique needs of remote fly-in regions along James Bay in Northern Ontario and Northern Quebec.

Be on the Ground

Several northern participants endorsed the idea of having Council representatives on the ground in the North to help build relationships and to provide in-person support to people and organizations trying to access Council grant programs. A participant from Yukon said Canadian Heritage already had a representative in the territory who was able to connect with and understand the community in a much different way, and there could be similar benefits if the Council did the same. Another participant said having a dedicated northern representative at the Council would be helpful even if that person is based in Ottawa, as people in the North would know they have someone they could contact.

Increase Infrastructure

The lack of sufficient arts venues in the North to practice, create and perform or exhibit continues to be a challenge, particularly in smaller communities. This was exacerbated by COVID-19 as artists were no longer able to access infrastructure and in-person resources in other parts of Canada. The Council should examine how it can help the North become more sustainable in this regard, perhaps through support for the construction of a performing arts centre or the creation of performing arts hubs.

Limited internet access throughout the North puts northern artists at a significant disadvantage to those in the South, including making it more difficult for northern artists and organizations to apply for funding or do other fundraising activities online. The Council was asked to use its influence wherever possible to amplify requests for better connectivity and internet service in the North.

Provide Northern-Specific Funding

The extreme distances between communities in the North and between the North and the rest of Canada means northern artists and arts organizations have much higher travel costs than those in most parts of southern Canada. Participants asked the Council to provide specific travel funding for northern artists and events that recognizes these higher costs.



“As a festival, we spend a lot on travel for artists and also for equipment, gear and supplies. We rely heavily on in-kind sponsorships. With the pandemic this year, we’re worried about what our sponsors will be able to provide for us. Moving forward, we’re really worried about this piece holding us back in terms of hosting and exporting artists.”

– Dialogue session participant

Another festival organizer noted that COVID-19 quarantine restrictions have made it difficult to bring in artists from the South to take part in their festival. Ongoing financial support from the Council is needed so organizers can adapt while continuing to support their communities and artists.

Territorial arts funding can be more limited than what is available from provinces. In the Northwest Territories, for example, there is a single source of funding for artists who must compete with every other artist and festival, and the funds can be exhausted quite quickly. It was suggested the Council could provide additional dedicated funding for territorial arts organizations and artists, particularly those who are young or emerging and who would benefit from an entry-level grant program.

Reduce Cultural Barriers

The Council should make it easier for people in the North to apply for grants by funding grant writing coaches who can help draft applications, particularly on behalf of individuals and groups who may not put emphasis on the written word, which was noted to be common among Inuit. In order to further reduce language barriers, the Council should also review its application forms to simplify the wording or translate them into Inuktitut. Mentorship between older and younger generations is an important way of learning among Inuit and should be supported by the Council.

Conclusion

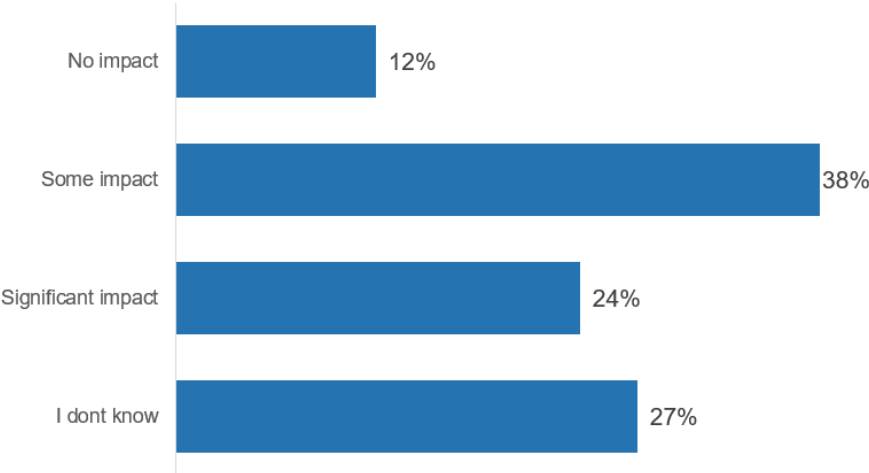
2020 has been a difficult year for all Canadians, including those working in the arts sector. COVID-19 forced many arts venues to close for extended periods and artists were unable to travel, perform or exhibit their work. The Council is therefore especially grateful that so many people took the time despite these unprecedented challenges and hardships to participate in these engagements and to offer their suggestions on how the Council can continue to support the arts in Canada over the next five years.

Whether it is to help the arts sector recover from the effects of COVID-19, to find ways to ensure more equitable funding distribution across Canada, to strengthen the Council's role as a facilitator and advocate, or to support and encourage the arts in promoting social activism and social justice, the input received has been as varied as the arts and artists themselves.

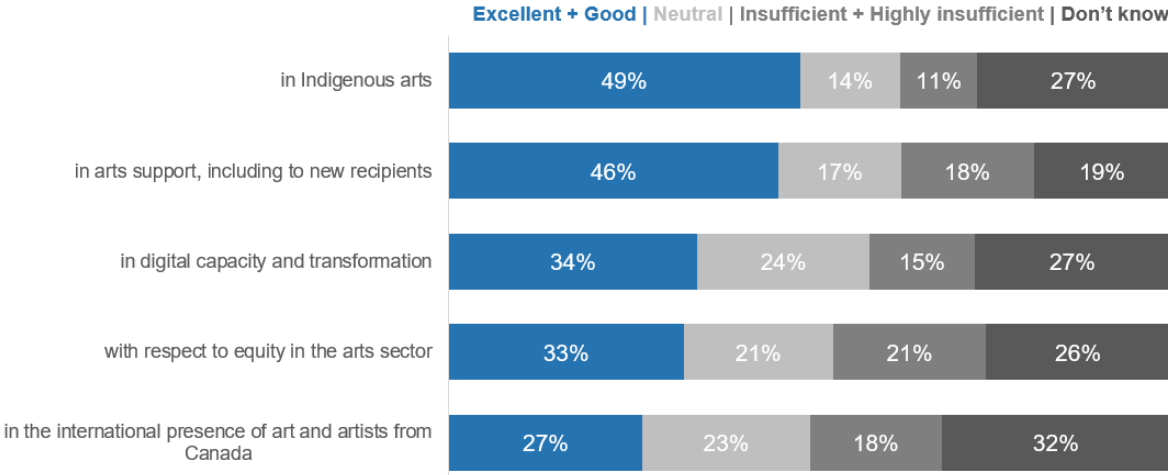
The task now is to consider all that has been heard within the development of the Council's 2021-2026 Strategic Plan. The Council is proud to be a strong supporter and advocate for Canada's arts sector and looks forward to all that can be achieved together in the future.

Appendix A: Choicebook™ results

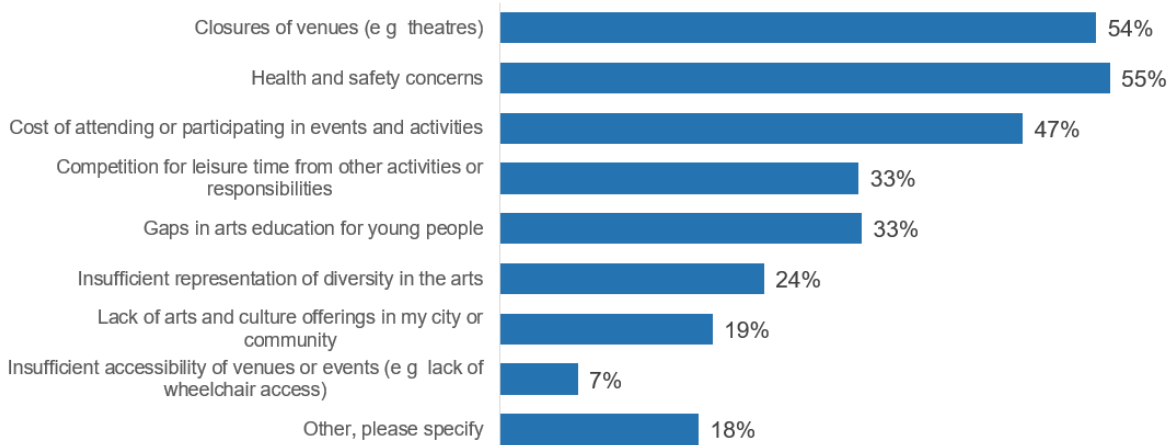
Over the past four years, how much of an impact has the Council had in advancing the Canadian arts sector?



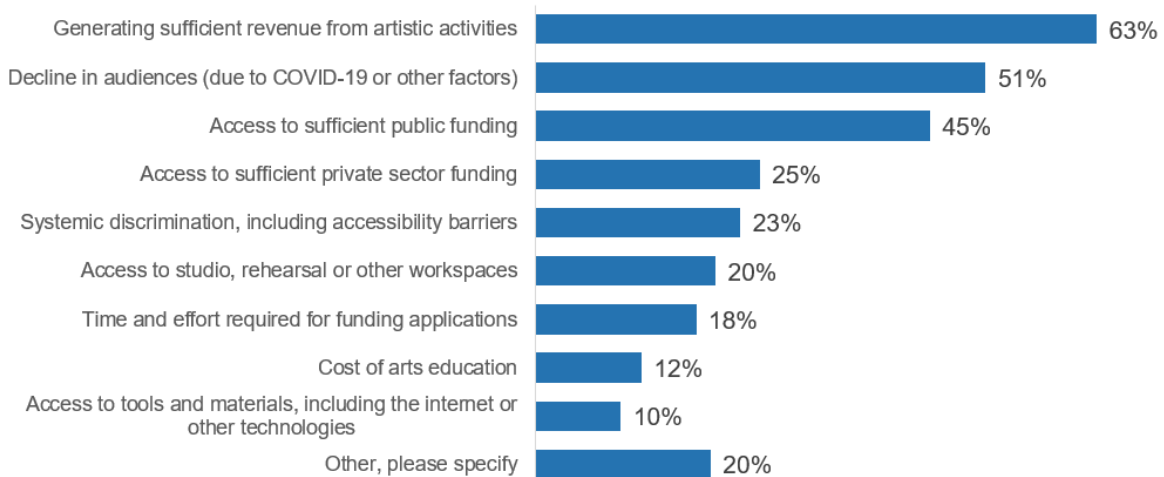
Over the last four years, how would you rate the progress of the Council in effecting positive change...



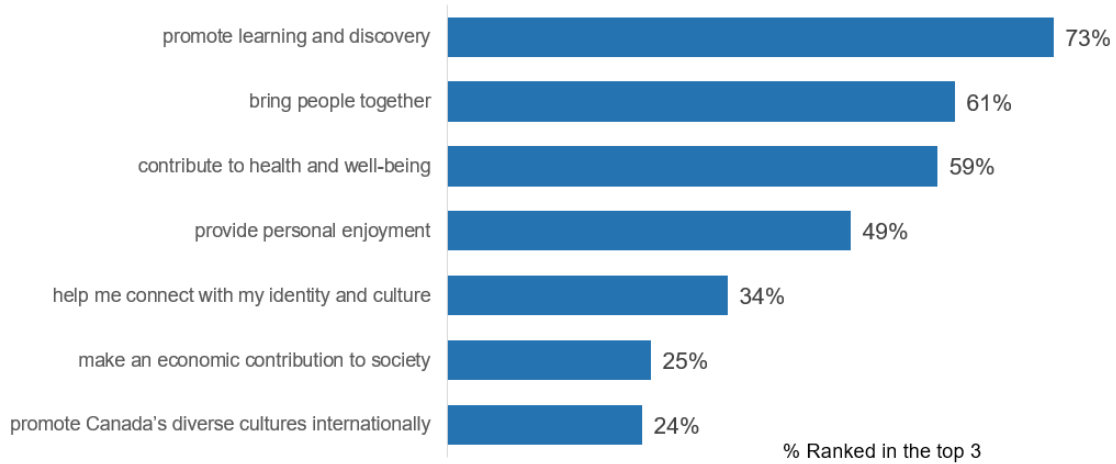
Within the next five years, what will be the most significant barriers to access and engagement with the arts in Canada? (select top 3)



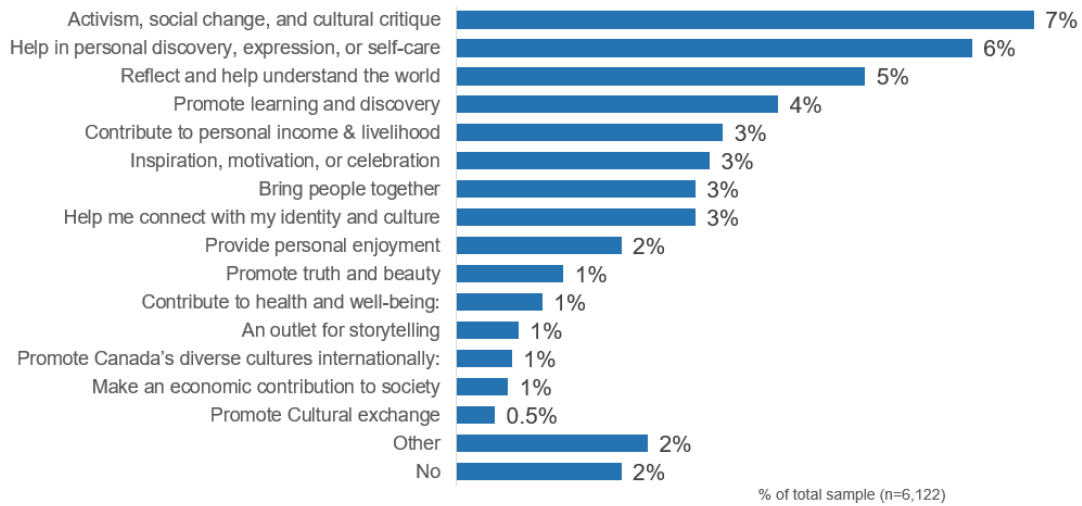
Within the next five years, what will be the most significant barriers to making art in Canada? (select top 3)



The arts are important to me because they...
 (Asked to rank the seven options from most important to least important)

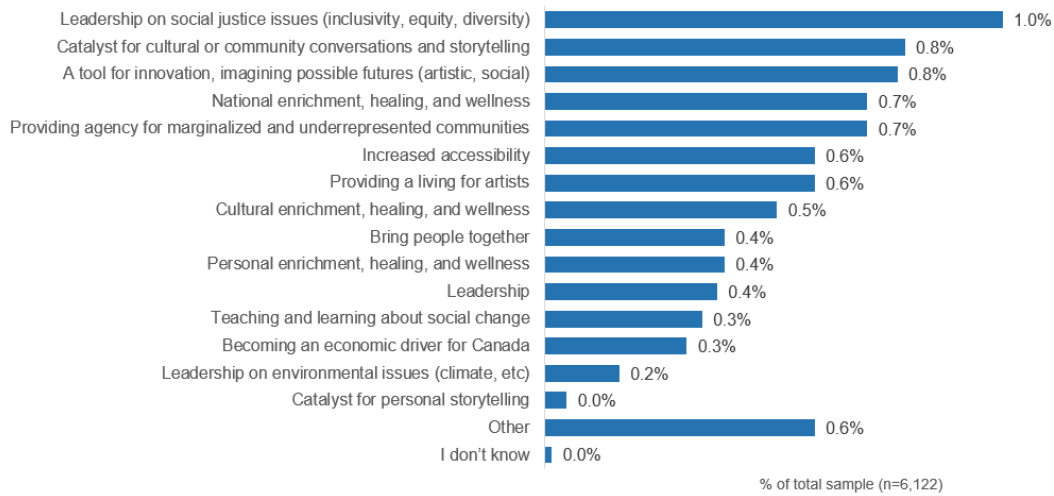


Are there any other reasons the arts are important to you?



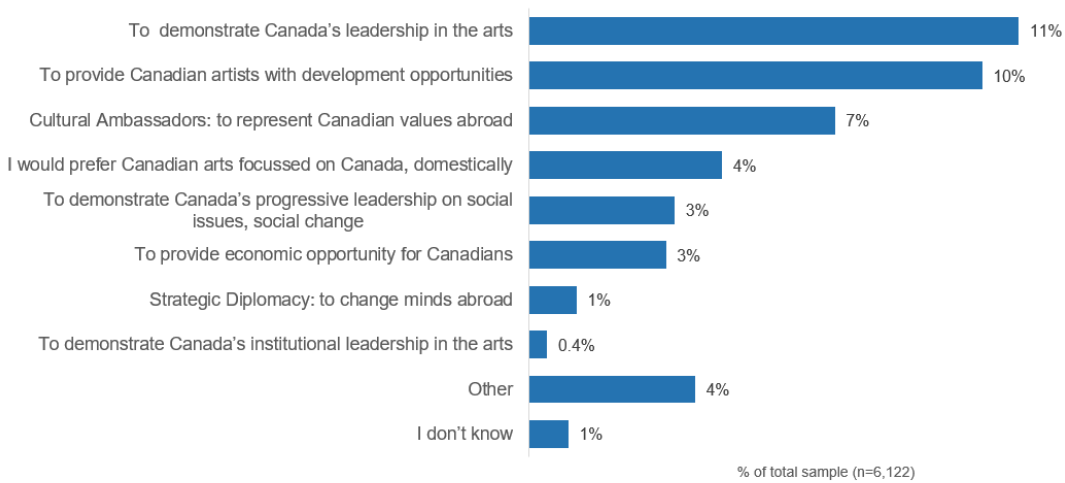
From 2,837 (46%) open-ended answers that were each categorized into one of these themes. The remaining 3,285 (54%) respondents did not provide an answer or did not finish completing the survey.

What role would you like to see the arts play in Canada over the next five years?



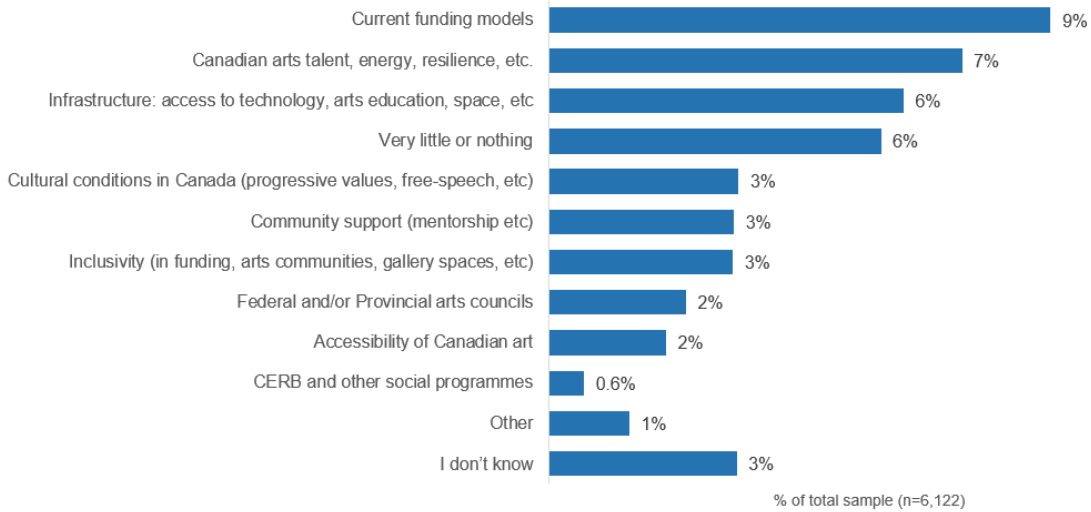
From 507 (8%) open-ended answers that were each categorized into one of these themes. The remaining 5,616 (92%) respondents did not provide an answer or did not finish completing the survey.

What role would you like to see Canadian arts play on the international stage over the next five years?



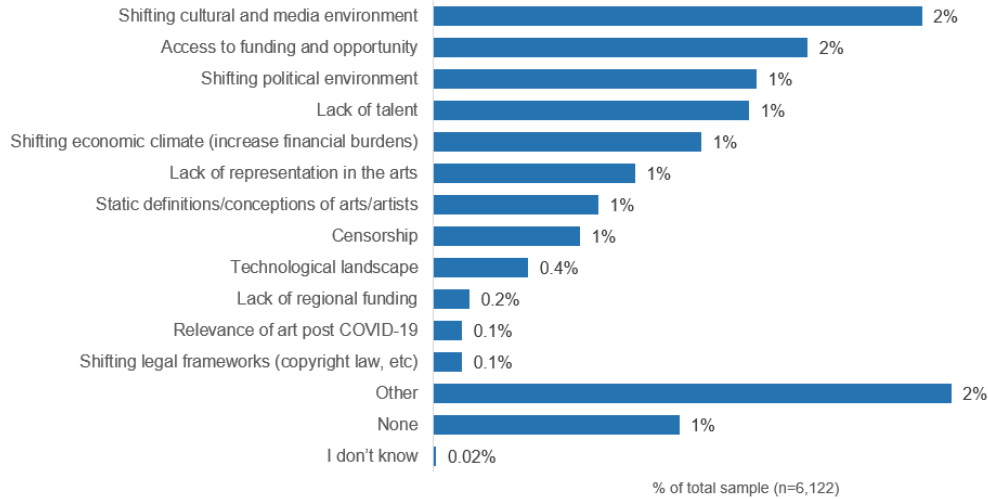
From 2,772 (45%) open-ended answers that were each categorized into one of these themes. The remaining 3,350 (55%) respondents did not provide an answer or did not finish completing the survey.

What is currently working well in terms of making art in Canada?



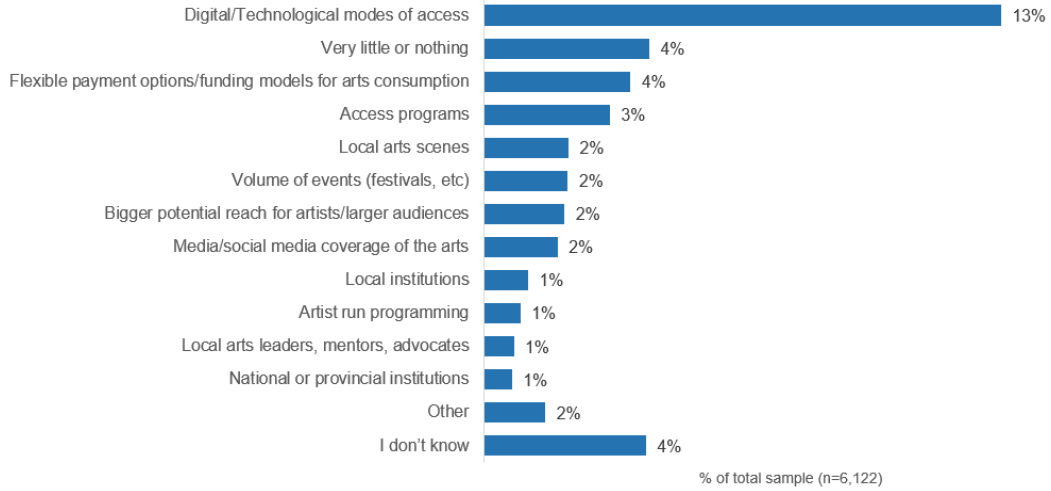
From 2,892 (47%) open-ended answers that were each categorized into one of these themes. The remaining 3,230 (53%) respondents did not provide an answer or did not finish completing the survey.

Other, please specify: Within the next five years, what will be the most significant barriers to making art in Canada?



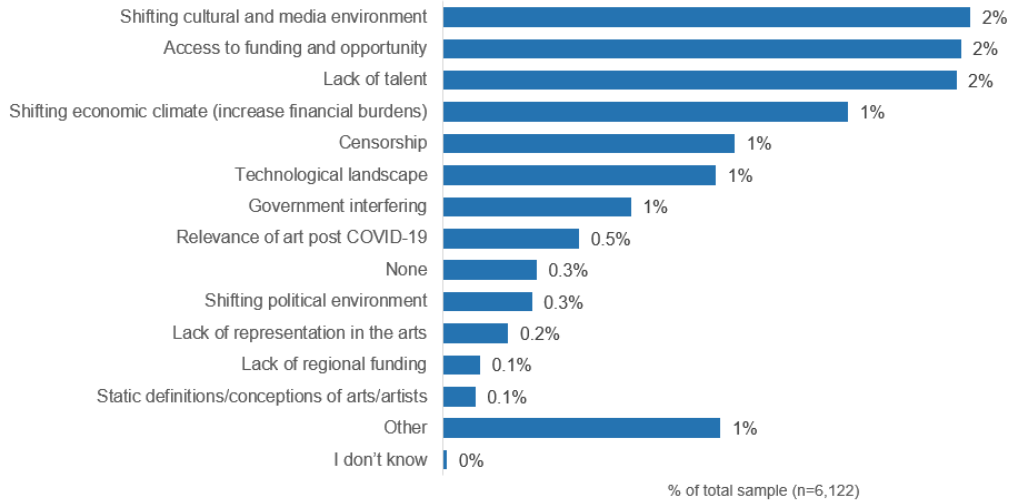
From 883 (14%) open-ended answers that were each categorized into one of these themes. The remaining 5,239 (86%) respondents did not provide an answer or did not finish completing the survey.

What is currently working well in terms of how people access and experience the arts in Canada?



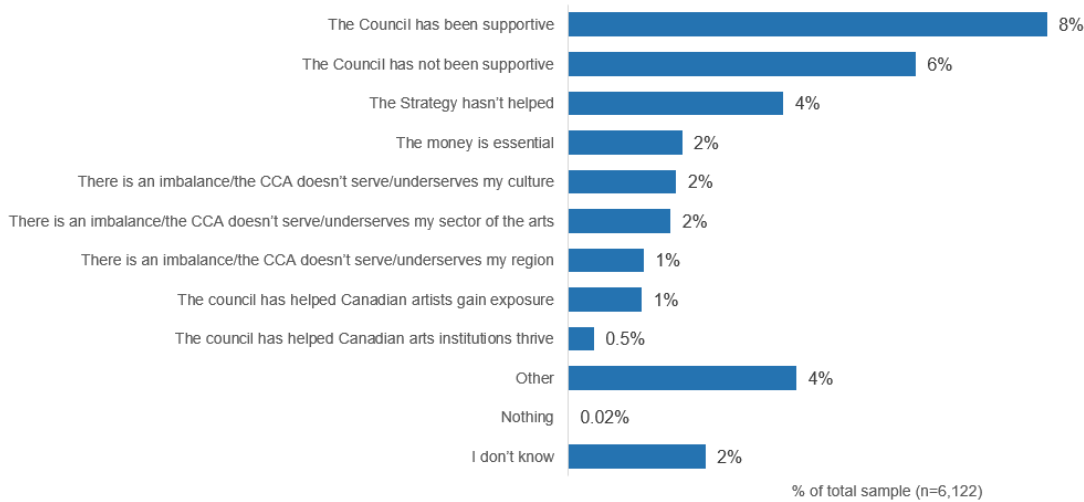
From 2,553 (42%) open-ended answers that were each categorized into one of these themes. The remaining 3,569 (58%) respondents did not provide an answer or did not finish completing the survey.

Other, please specify: Within the next five years, what will be the most significant barriers to access and engagement with the arts in Canada?



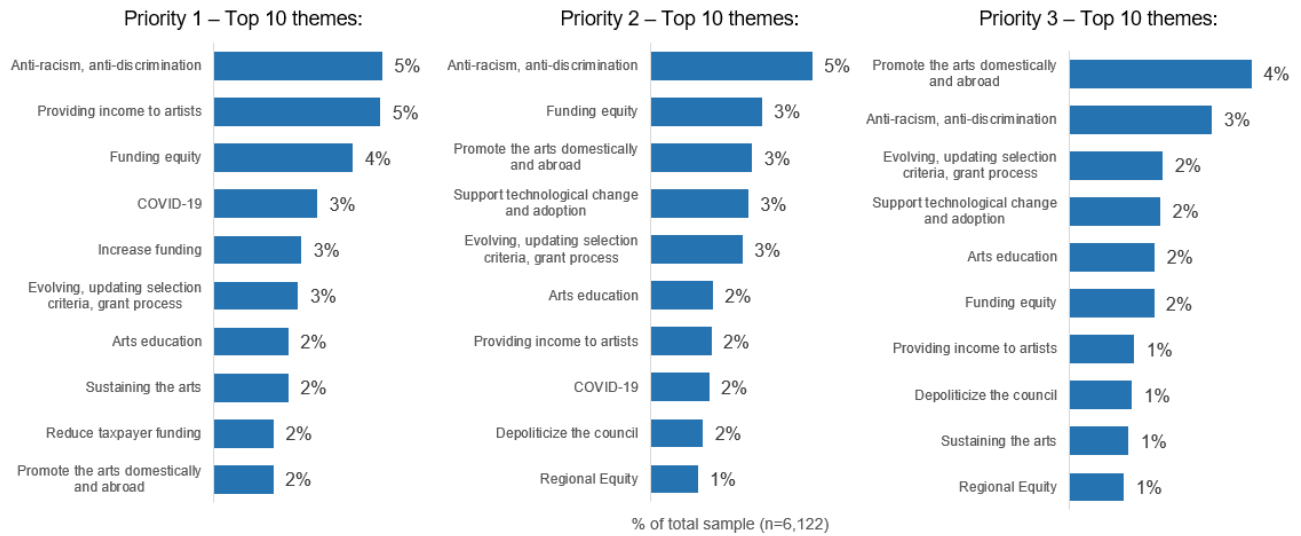
From 734 (12%) open-ended answers that were each categorized into one of these themes. The remaining 5,388 (88%) respondents did not provide an answer or did not finish completing the survey.

Over the past four years, how much of an impact has the Council had in advancing the Canadian arts sector? – Please explain why:



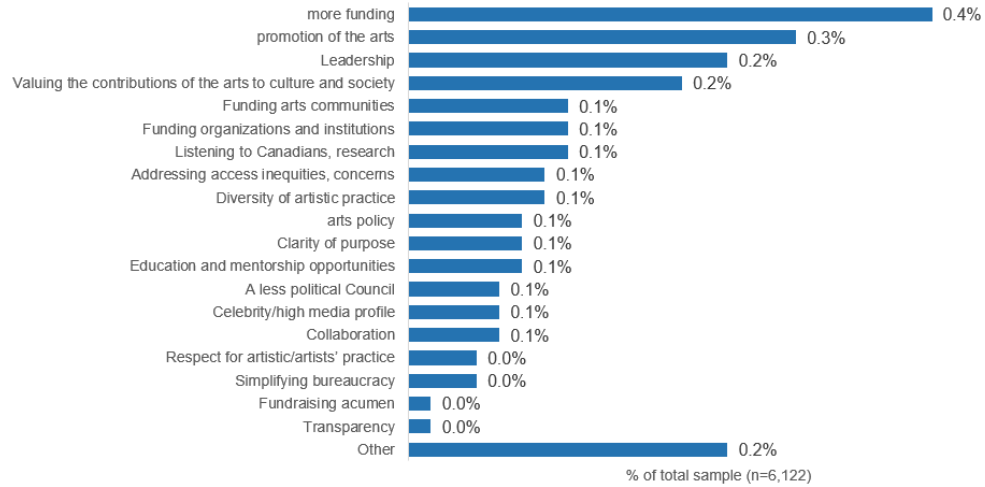
From 2,040 (33%) open-ended answers that were each categorized into one of these themes. The remaining 4,082 (67%) respondents did not provide an answer or did not finish completing the survey.

For the Council's next strategic plan, what do you think the top three priorities should be for the next five years?



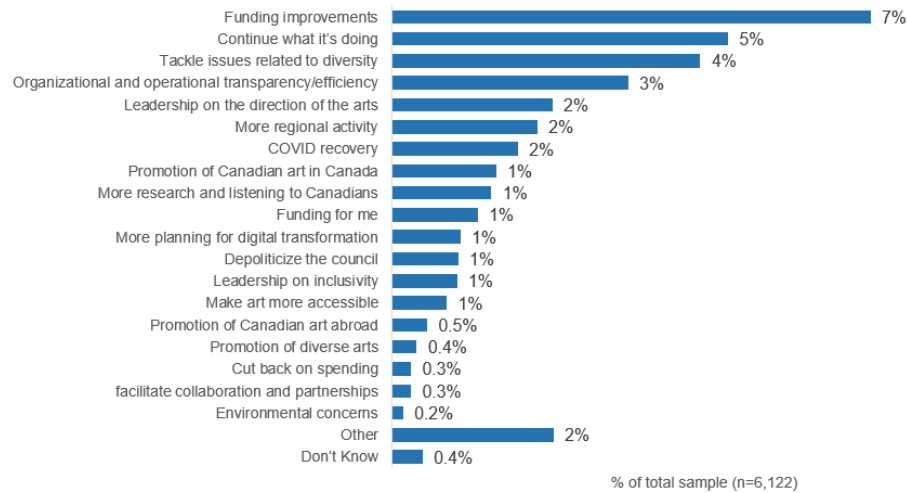
From 2,755 (45%), 2,309 (38%), and 1,677 (27%) open-ended answers that were each categorized into one of these themes. The remaining 3,367 (55%), 3,813 (62%), and 4,445 (73%) respondents did not provide an answer or did not finish completing the survey. Only showing top 10 themes out of 25 categories.

What do you feel is needed to support and develop strong arts leadership in Canada?



From 148 (2%) open-ended answers that were each categorized into one of these themes. The remaining 5,974 (98%) respondents did not provide an answer or did not finish completing the survey.

What are your expectations of the Canada Council for the Arts as Canada's national arts funder for the next five years?



From 2,303 (38%) open-ended answers that were each categorized into one of these themes. The remaining 3,819 (62%) respondents did not provide an answer or did not finish completing the survey.

Photo credits (from start to finish):

Alex Janvier. Photo by Martin Lipman

The Tempest, by The Citadel Theatre, Edmonton. Actors: Lorne Cardinal, Thurga Kanagasekarampillai, Ray Strachan; set and costume design: Drew Facey. Photo by Ian Jackson

Photo by [Matthieu Comoy](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Photo by [Mike Von](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Mozongi by Zab Maboungou, with Mithra Rabel, Marie-Denise Bettez, Karla Etienne and Salomao Almirante, presented at the One Dance UK Re:generations Conference, at The Lowry, Salford, UK, November 7–9, 2019. Photo by Foteini Christofilopoulou