

REPORT

Facilitators' Report on a Meeting of the National Arts Service Organizations with the Canada Council for the Arts

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	1
Introduction	2
1. Meeting of the Canada Council and the National Arts Service Organizations	2
1.1 Preparation of the Day.....	2
1.2 The Agenda of the Day	2
1.3 Structure of this Report.....	2
A. Setting the Stage: An Overview of the Canada Council’s “Change Agenda”	3
1. A Change Agenda	3
1.1 Key Priorities for the Future	3
B. Summary of Key Themes	4
1. Q&A Session with Robert Sirman	4
1.1 Need for More Information on the Canada Council’s “Change Agenda”	4
2. Facilitated NASO Discussion of the Changing Environment	4
2.1. All Arts Disciplines are Facing Rapid Change	4
2.2. The Arts Community is Embracing Change	5
2.3. The Arts Sector Engages the Public and Connects with Communities	5
2.4. Reflecting On NASOs Serving Their Members in Turbulent Times.....	5
2.5. Reflections on the Consultative Process	5
C. Concluding Observations on Potential Future Directions	7
1. Potential Future Directions	7
1.1 Regular Meetings Between NASOs and Funders.....	7
1.2 Cross-Sectoral Thematic Discussions.....	7
1.3 Toward a Policy on the Consultative Process	7
Annex 1 – Meeting Agenda	8

Introduction

1. Meeting of the Canada Council and the National Arts Service Organizations

1.1 Preparation of the Day

On October 22, 2012, the Canada Council for the Arts (the Canada Council) hosted an annual meeting of the National Arts Service Organizations (NASOs) in Ottawa with the purpose of exchanging information and engaging in discussion. The Canada Council introduced its “Change Agenda” to the gathering of NASOs explaining that this is a transformational time for the Council and for arts funders generally.

An ad-hoc Committee of volunteers was struck from amongst the Canadian NASO community to assist the Canada Council in the planning of the meeting. The services of MDR Burgess Consultants, as represented by Marilyn Burgess and Maria De Rosa were retained.

The mandate of the consultants was three-fold: to help develop the meeting agenda; to design and moderate a two-hour structured discussion on the theme of change within the arts; and to prepare a brief meeting report capturing the key themes and proposed actions emanating from the meeting.

1.2 The Agenda of the Day

The first part of the day was dedicated to the Canada Council’s presentation of its “Change Agenda” to participants. This was followed by meetings by Canada Council’s Section Heads with disciplinary NASO representatives with the goal to describe the Canada Council’s impact of the change agenda on the various disciplines.

Two question and answer sessions were held between Robert Sirman, Director and CEO of the Canada Council, and participating NASO representatives. NASOs then had an opportunity to meet together in a facilitated session with the goal to discuss the impacts of change in their disciplines, and the roles they are playing in the changing environment. Annex 1 of this report contains an agenda of the day.

1.3 Structure of this Report

The report that follows is divided into three brief sections:

- Section A provides a brief overview of the Canada Council’s “Change Agenda”;
- Section B summarize the key themes brought forward by the NASOs;
- Section C proposes concluding observations on potential future directions for consideration by the NASOs.

A. Setting the Stage: An Overview of the Canada Council’s “Change Agenda”¹

1. A Change Agenda

The backdrop for the meeting between the Canada Council for the Arts and the National Arts Service Organizations was the Canada Council’s “large-scale change agenda” that is now underway.²

As noted recently by the Council, the agency is undertaking a profound examination of its work to ensure it can keep up with “the seismic changes” socially, within the arts sector and demographically in the country.³ While reaffirming its commitment to its five strategic priorities and three themes outlined in its strategic plan 2011-2016, *Strengthening Connections*, the Canada Council has also indicated its commitment to be responsive to change.⁴

Responding to changes in the environment with the aim of ensuring the sustainability of the arts into the future, the Council has embarked on a substantive review of programs, encouraging greater access to national and international markets, and inviting a public discussion on public engagement with Canadian arts.

1.1 Key Priorities for the Future

Over the next three years, the Council plans to implement a number of changes including a cost-saving move to a new location, streamlined operational processes and reviews of the Flying Squad program, the Public Lending Right program, and the operating grant programs. The Council aims to review options that address its traditional commitment to the core of creative arts practice while reflecting areas of increasing priority including equity, public engagement and national and international market access.⁵

Broadening market access is seen as a critical part of strengthening organizational practices and aligned to the Council’s expressed desire to more actively promote an “enterprise mentality,” that supports greater diversification of funding sources, stronger promotion, acting on opportunities, expanding market outreach and reaching out to the public in other ways.⁶

The Council is also reframing discussion about the arts, shifting its language towards a focus on the public interest, and communicating the value of the arts to the lives of Canadians as it encourages greater discussion of public engagement ⁷.

¹ The Context section draws from the following reports: *Annual Report 2011-2012*, Canada Council for the Arts, 2012, *Condensed transcript –Teleconference with NASOs*, Canada Council for the Arts, May 30, 2012, “Canada Council for the Arts Poised for Change,” Canada Council for the Arts News Release, October 10, 2012, <http://www.canadacouncil.ca/news/releases/2012/kw129938565625800420.htm>

² *Annual Report 2011-2012*, Op. Cit.

³ *Annual Report 2011-2012*, Op. Cit and *Condensed transcript*, Op. Cit.

⁴ “Canada Council for the Arts Poised for Change,” Op. Cit.

⁵ *Condensed transcript*, Op. Cit.

⁶ IBID

⁷ Public Engagement in the arts: <http://www.canadacouncil.ca/NR/rdonlyres/2CBC742E-DB5B-42BA-8F89-7C8FCC3A1966/0/FinalversionofENGLISHPublicEngagementpapertoeprintit.pdf>

B. Summary of Key Themes

1. Q&A Session with Robert Sirman

1.1 Need for More Information on the Canada Council's "Change Agenda"

NASOs were interested to learn more about the specifics of the Canada Council's "Change Agenda" and the impact of these potential changes on artists and arts organizations. For example, a question was asked about whether the Canada Council intended to help arts organizations attract greater private sector funding. Another participant was interested to learn more about whether the Council had specific public engagement activities in mind that it hoped to see arts organizations undertake. Another question posed was whether the Council would begin to measure the impact that arts organizations are currently making as a result of the operating funding they receive. Another organization commented that it would be beneficial for the arts community to understand the role that the Canada Council should play in promoting the arts to the public.

The Ad-Hoc Assembly of culturally diverse and aboriginal arts organizations presented their concerns with respect to the challenges they continue to face in trying to integrate into existing structures and their desire to be consulted on the Canada Council's "Change Agenda." A formal intervention was read aloud and presented to Robert Sirman.

As the Canada Council moves forward with its "Change Agenda," Robert Sirman strongly encouraged the NASOs to participate alongside the Canada Council in its development and implementation. He strongly emphasized that the Canada Council cannot make change in isolation from the professional arts community.

2. Facilitated NASO Discussion of the Changing Environment

2.1. All Arts Disciplines are Facing Rapid Change

Change is recognized to be taking place very rapidly, including demographic change and emerging new artistic practices. NASOs in some cases are finding it a challenge to keep up. For example, the Regroupement québécois de la danse noted an urgent need to revisit its ten-year master plan for dance in Quebec, only a few short years after launching it.

Changing patterns of cultural consumption is eroding established business and revenue models. Publishers, for example, continue to grapple with the impact digital technologies are having on publishing, which has led to deflating values for books and magazines. Established distribution chains are changing, creating new challenges and uncertainty. Publishers also anticipate greater competition from other media following the latest copyright reforms.

Earned revenues are down throughout the Music discipline, creating a challenging time for music organizations and musicians, and a need for market development.

For their part, dancers note that there is less paid work available.

2.2. The Arts Community is Embracing Change

The arts are already responding to the changing environment and producing value for Canadians.

It was noted by InterArts and Theatre that many in the arts community are already working as facilitators for change. Some examples of this that were identified by meeting participants included:

- Dance organizations have developed regional touring structures and increased networking between regional and national presenters to bring dance performance to more communities.
- Visual artists perceive themselves as highly adaptable. Visual Arts organizations note that the arts have been under pressure from provincial and municipal funders to diversify their revenues and have responded accordingly.
- Culturally diverse and aboriginal organizations are at the forefront of adapting to demographic changes.
- Media Arts organizations are adaptable, their history and evolution defined by successive waves of technological change.

2.3. The Arts Sector Engages the Public and Connects with Communities

A number of speakers at the meeting noted the valuable role being played by artists and NASOs in building their local communities. Artist-run centres in the Visual Arts, and smaller NASOs in the Music Sector were noted for their crucial role in engaging the public and developing their communities.

Music organizations and smaller NASOs were recognized as playing a crucial role in Music in community building. In Visual Arts, artist-run centres were referred to as “ground level” operating structures, producing value for communities.

It was also noted that the Canada Council’s measurement of the outcomes will be critical to capturing the value that already exists and communicating it to Canadians.

2.4. Reflecting on Serving Members of the NASOs in Turbulent Times

Members of the Music community noted that there is an array of things that NASOs are doing or could be doing to better serve their members in turbulent times. NASOs require the capacity to provide services to artists and need to reflect together and work together on areas of common interest to achieve things that are a challenge to do as single organizations.

For example, NASOs play a role in convening members and sharing information and there is a need for more research that might better be undertaken collectively. NASOs in the Music sector could also be playing a supporting role in sharing best practices, and providing mentorship opportunities to facilitate intergenerational knowledge transfer. Organizations might work together to co-present their service offerings.

2.5. Reflections on the Consultative Process

2.5.1 Greater Clarity in the Consultative Process

NASOs appreciate the opportunity to be consulted by the Canada Council on matters of importance but at the same time, many were of the view that topics discussed at the meeting

were done in a context lacking concreteness. NASOs are eager to understand and contribute their reflections to the Canada Council's "Change Agenda".

For example, there is concern about potential cuts to operating resources as these are seen as essential. It was noted that the best work emerges when arts organizations have adequate support, particularly to pay for staff and artist fees. Some sectors noted that they are growing and seeking to achieve greater sustainability. Some noted that cuts to overextended organizations would have a significant impact.

It was noted that NASOs desire greater communication and transparency in the consultative process. Some noted the need for discipline dialogues, and wondered how the information gathered by the Canada Council is to be used.

Some welcomed the opportunity to come together to discuss matters of shared concern. One of the questions that emerged from the meeting was the willingness of the Canada Council to help NASOs continue their discussions.

2.5.2 Need to Assure Diverse Representation in National Conversations

A consistent message that was raised is the need to include marginal voices when national meetings of arts professionals are convened. "Conversations" need to reflect the increasingly diverse character of Canadian society due to ongoing demographic change.

A comment was made on the notable absence at the meeting of groups lacking in resources with which to participate in the discussion. It was noted that the Ad-Hoc Assembly of culturally diverse and aboriginal arts represents 40 organizations, but lacks infrastructure and resources. The same is true for disability arts. Sharing information can be a challenge for under-resourced organizations without sufficient resources to access and integrate new information.

C. Concluding Observations on Potential Future Directions

1. Potential Future Directions

1.1 Regular Meetings Between NASOs and Funders

In general, participating NASOs greatly appreciated the opportunity to hear directly from the Canada Council on its “Change Agenda” and to have the opportunity to ask questions of the Council’s Director and CEO, Mr. Robert Sirman.

Participants also appreciated the opportunity to speak directly to each other, and many expressed the view point that they would have liked to have more time for this activity, and to have the opportunity to explore a wider range of subjects. In a time of great change for the arts community, it is imperative that opportunities be created for arts professionals to discuss issues of national and regional importance.

NASO’s would benefit from regular regional and national meetings that build relationships and trust, and provide opportunities to enhance the professional development of arts leaders. These discussions could be contemplated at a regional level with regional counterparts as well as at the provincial and municipal levels with funders.

1.2 Cross-Sectoral Thematic Discussions

Much could be gained if NASOs could come together to discuss cross-sectoral thematic issues of importance to the arts sector and the public, on a regional and on a national basis. There are a number of issues of great concern and importance to the evolution of the arts sector that would benefit from national and regional discussion. Among the themes identified during the facilitated meeting of the NASOs are the following: changing patterns of public consumption of arts, changing models of dissemination and earned revenue generation, cultural diversity and demographic change. Thematic discussion could extend to professional development, new funding models and advocacy, amongst others.

1.3 Toward a Policy on the Consultative Process Between NASOs and the Canada Council for the Arts

The Canada Council expressed the wish for NASOs to be involved in the Council’s “Change Agenda” and announced that discipline-based consultations would be taking place in the future. From the perspective of the NASOs, what is lacking is a clearer definition and communication on the part of the Canada Council on the type of consultative process to take place and the timeline. What could be considered is the development of a policy on consultations which would have the benefit of clarifying the roles and expectations of the Canada Council and the NASOs in the consultative process.

Annex 1 – Meeting Agenda

AGENDA (Revised)

9:00-9:05	Welcome Remarks John Goldsmith, Director, Stakeholder Relations Canada Council for the Arts
9:05-10:30	Leading the Change Agenda Presentation by Robert Sirman CEO and Director Canada Council for the Arts Questions and Answers/Discussion
10:30-11:00	Break
11:00-12:00	Disciplinary Meetings Discussions with Disciplinary Section heads about the implications of the change agenda
12:00-13:00	Networking Lunch
13:00-13:35	Questions and Answers/Discussion (continued)
13:35-13:45	<i>Facilitated Session of National Arts Service Organizations</i> Objectives and Process for Break out groups Facilitators: Marilyn Burgess and Maria De Rosa
13:45-14:20	Break out groups: Identify challenges and opportunities posed by change environment and the change agenda and the current and potential future role that NASOs can play in the changing environment and what they require to be true catalysts
14:20-14:50	Reports from break out groups
14:50-15:00	Summary Marilyn Burgess
15:00-15:10	Closing remarks Robert Sirman John Goldsmith