

May 20, 2020

Attention:

**The Honourable Steven Guilbeault
Minister of Canadian Heritage
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
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Dear Minister,

I am writing on behalf of an ad-hoc coalition of Canadian Arts Service Organizations regarding Phase 2 of the \$500 million Emergency Support Fund for Cultural, Heritage, and Sport Organizations.

Firstly, we are truly grateful for the creation of this fund, and we thank you for not only providing much needed relief, but for disbursing funds rapidly during this time of crisis.

We understand that, while Phase 1 funds are being directed at current clients of Canadian Heritage and its portfolio organizations, Phase 2 funding will be available to initiatives that do not currently receive support from the Federal Government. This is excellent news and will surely play a pivotal role in the very survival of many small cultural initiatives. To this end, we strongly encourage that Phase 2 dissemination prioritizes initiatives led by and serving equity-seeking groups. To this end, decisions around the administration of these funds can, however inadvertently, preclude applications from many culturally important arts initiatives, and can disproportionately exclude those working within marginalized and diverse communities. Barriers that applicants may face include, but are not limited to:

- Requirements for initiatives to be operating as legally incorporated entities;
- Complexities of application processes (impacting applicants experiencing literacy barriers, newcomers, and those new to digital granting portals);
- Restrictive guidelines and eligible activities which might not be applicable to all models and methods of delivering activity;
- Access to deaf and disability supports in completing applications;
- Access to steady internet (impacting artists in remote regions, low-income artists without home internet);

- Access to sufficient technological devices (i.e. online portals can be difficult to navigate using cell phones; libraries, which are closed, offer a key internet access point to low-income Canadians);
- Lack of support in navigating guidelines, writing and submitting applications;
- Lack of operational and staff funding to support the development and completion of time-intensive applications;
- Lack of outreach within hard-to-reach communities (many cultural leaders will not be aware of the opportunity to receive support);
- Alienation from major funding programs, and mistrust of institutions which results in a lack of direct personal assistance and advice.

To reduce barriers and increase access to small arts groups and initiatives, we recommend that the disbursement of Phase 2 of the Emergency Support Fund for Cultural, Heritage and Sport Organizations include:

- Prioritizing initiatives led by, and serving, equity-seeking groups with a focus on those who identify as Indigenous, Black, People of Colour, official language minority communities, newcomer, deaf and disabled, and LGBTQ;
- Prioritizing initiatives led-by, and serving, those affected by systemic barriers including but not limited to mental health issues, poverty, lack of education, precarious employment, involvement with the justice system;
- Prioritizing small artist-led initiatives with annual budgets under \$200,000, that do not receive sustainable funding, and are not current clients of federal government funding agencies nor its partners¹
- A portion of Phase 2 funds dedicated exclusively to the above criteria.

To accomplish this, we recommend that Canadian Heritage employ a third-party recommender model and engage local arts organizations as advisors. These are arts organizations that can provide input into criteria and guidelines, outreach within their own communities, identify prospective applicants most in need, support artists to develop and submit applications, and recommend to Canadian Heritage or to its partners which applicants should receive funding. We recommend that Canadian Heritage leverage these organizations' community connections, and local expertise to inform the process and reach intended recipients.

¹ Artist-Run Centres and Collectives Conference and her allies circulated a survey to assess the impact of COVID-19 on artist-run centres and other small organizations in the first 30-day period of closure due to physical-distancing measures. Artist-run centres are typically very small organizations, two-thirds of them with annual budgets less than \$250,000, and account for just 10% of the \$146 million in public funding received by visual arts organizations that report to CADAC (Canadian Art Data/Données sur les arts au Canada). On average, survey respondents indicated that the total value of their anticipated loss of earned revenue was between \$1,000 and \$5,000. On average, respondents indicated that this amount represents between <10% and 25% of their organization's overall revenue.

Additionally, many arts organizations may be able to offer a range of supports to recipients throughout project delivery. Centering the funding process within the community level will increase access for applicants and will ensure that these funds support many high-impact grassroots initiatives.

This “third-party recommender” model is successfully employed by other arts funders; the Ontario Arts Council, for example, engages third-party recommender organizations to assist them with visual, media, theatre, and literary arts grants.

As Canadian Arts Service Organizations, we offer our full collaboration in developing and implementing such a model in an efficient and timely fashion, and we welcome a meeting with you and your staff, and with partner agencies to begin the process. We are prepared to provide support to Canadian Heritage and its partners throughout the entire process including the creation of a final report to publicly share the department’s commitment to equity in the arts.

In these uncertain times, getting this process right is critical, and, by implementing simple strategies, we know that we can ultimately increase diversity and representation in the arts, and ensure that more artists and communities can participate, and see themselves reflected in, Canada's vibrant cultural ecosystem.

Sincerely,



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April Britski
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Dermot Wilson
Executive Director
Nipissing Region Curatorial Collective - thenrcc.com

Attached:

Achieving Equity or Waiting for Godot (research by Cultural Pluralism in the Arts Movement Ontario)

Open Letter from Grassroots Arts Initiatives (CARFAC Ontario)

COVID-19 Impact Survey (Artist-Run Centres and Collectives Conference)

cc:

Irene Cheung, Policy Advisor, Office to the Minister of Canadian Heritage

Julie Dabrusin, MP Toronto-Danforth, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage

Alexandre Boulerice, MP Rosemount--La-Petite-Patrie, Critic for Canadian Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Canadian Heritage, Deputy Critic for Environment and Climate Change

Peter Julian, MP New Westminster-Burnaby, House Leader, NDP Spokesperson on Finance, Deputy Spokesperson on Canadian Heritage

Simon Brault, Director and CEO, Canada Council for the Arts

Carolyn Warren, Director General, Arts Granting Programs Canada Council for the Arts