



Media Arts Network Ontario
1137 Dupont Street
Toronto, ON, M6H-2A3
(647) 951-4810

Simon Brault
Director and Chief Executive Officer
Canada Council for the Arts
150 Elgin St
P.O. Box 1047
Ottawa, ON Canada
K1P 5V8

Carolyn Vesely
Chief Executive Officer
Ontario Arts Council
121 Bloor Street East, 7th Floor
Toronto, ON M4W 3M5

May 19, 2020

Dear Simon Brault and Carolyn Vesely,

In the wake of pandemic shutdowns, long-standing social inequities have become more visible than ever, including those in the arts sector. While emergency measures rolled out to date have helped to stabilize some arts and culture institutions, high barriers to eligibility for emerging and unincorporated arts organizations have resulted in many groups being left behind. Over the past months the Media Arts Network of Ontario has organized a wide range of community discussions, including a series focused on the needs of small and emerging groups in the visual and media arts with Critical Distance Centre for Curators. From these consultations we have identified a significant need in the community and a possible remedy. This initial letter will be followed by an open letter with additional signatories.

Emerging organizations often speak to needs unmet by existing institutions, playing a vital role in advancing struggles for equity, representation, and accessibility in the arts. These organizations represent the future of the arts sector, and as identified strategic priorities of public sector art funders, must not only survive but be supported to thrive beyond this and other crises.

The expectation of significant unpaid and underpaid labour from arts workers is built into the current project-based funding model for emerging and unincorporated arts organizations. Relying on project grants, they receive support to compensate artists for their labour at industry standard rates, but are not supported to adequately compensate their own staff, whose skills comprise the essential labour of care necessary for the success of any program.

As arts funding agencies continue to develop responsive strategies to support our sector, we request the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council to recognize the necessity and value of small and emerging groups and to tailor support for their operations in the following ways:

- Provide support for a minimum of one part-time position, providing a fair wage and realistic scope of work (grant amounts of \$15,000 - \$40,000/year)

- Provide support for a minimum of 12 months per application, with options for multi year support
- Emphasize groups led-by and serving equity-seeking groups as identified by funders
- Not support artistic programming for the public, audience and market development, or other activities supported through existing programs
- Not support consultant fees
- Be peer adjudicated with scoring matrices made available publicly
- Be open to applicants who have received one or more project grants from their agency
- Not count against application limits for project grants

Time is of the essence, and so we further recommend that:

- Federal and provincial arts funders convene no later than June 30, 2020 to begin developing shared standards for fair wages for cultural workers and to coordinate program launches
- Representative groups impacted by this discussion be invited to attend as observers
- Application deadlines be made available by Fall 2020 followed by a full roll-out in 2021 with a minimum of two deadlines
- Annual opportunities for community feedback be provided after first round of applications

It is our belief that such a sustaining program is the missing piece in the current funding landscape for emerging and unincorporated arts organizations. Funders can do much more to learn about how these groups engage and impact their respective communities, and to provide the concrete support needed to continue their work at levels that reflect the true cost and value of the labour that facilitates deeper connections between artists, organizations, and audiences. A vibrant and resilient arts sector is one that supports its organizations and workers at all levels of their development, not just those who are already established.

Sincerely,



Ben Donoghue
Director
Media Arts Network of Ontario

CC

Carolyn Warren, Director General, Arts Granting Programs Canada Council for the Arts
Kelly Langgard, Director of Granting Ontario Arts Council