

“Creating Our Future”

**Strategic Directions for the Canada Council for
the Arts**



Submission by the Canadian Conference of the Arts

“Creating Our Future”

Strategic Directions for the Canada Council for the Arts

The Canadian Conference of the Arts (CCA) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the strategic directions for the Canada Council for the Arts. Formed in 1945, the CCA is the national forum for the arts and cultural community in Canada. It provides research, analysis, and consultations on public policies affecting the arts and the Canadian cultural institutions and industries. The CCA fosters informed public debate on policy issues and seeks to advance the cultural rights of Canadians.

The CCA wishes to congratulate the Canada Council for the Arts on the breadth of the consultations it has engaged as it develops its Strategic Plan covering the years 2008-2011. The CCA regards this initiative as a welcome recognition of the maturity of the arts and culture sector in Canada. In undertaking these open consultations, the Council has shown both courage and a welcome appreciation that experience and imagination of the sector is an under-exploited resource. It is the hope of the CCA that the Council will consider any recommendations that come from this exercise seriously and wherever possible, reflect the best ideas in the new Strategic Plan.

The Importance of a National Arts Council

The Canadian Conference of the Arts believes that any strategic plan adopted by the Canada Council should reinforce the important role it plays as a *leader on the national level*.

The Council has a unique national overview on all forms of artistic expression and has amassed a phenomenal amount of information about the development of the arts, the situation of artists and how other levels of government and the private sector can work effectively together to build a national cultural legacy.

Throughout the past five decades, the Council, in partnership with artists, creators and arts professionals, has been able to foster the development a vibrant and diverse artistic sector. The capacity of the Council to continue this work is central to the long-term health of the arts in all parts of the country. Provincial and municipal support of the arts is an important element in the sustenance of the arts and culture in our country, however, consistency is often subject to the vagaries of political life.

By staking out a strong role as a *national* arts council, the Canada Council affirms the importance of a consistent federal presence throughout Canada and can encourage other levels of government and the private sector to maintain and enhance their role in the funding and promotion of the arts across Canada.

There are periodic movements and calls to decentralize the functions of the Canada Council by devolving funding to provincial arts councils or ministries of culture. Such a move would place the arts at a greater level of vulnerability and would impede the flow of work and artists across Canada and their ability to cooperate in co-productions, new forms of creation using electronic media and further reduce the national visibility of the arts.

The Council is also a *knowledge institution*, but it lacks a coherent plan for the development and distribution of the wealth of insights and coherent analyses about the state of the arts sector in its many manifestations. The knowledge mission or function of the Council as an institution is an under-valued resource currently. Sharing and cultivating rigorous research and analyses of various dimensions of the artistic experience in Canada is a unique capacity of the Council with its fifty year overview of the development and diversification of the arts sector in Canada.

Recommendations:

In order to manifest the leadership role of the Council, the CCA recommends that it consider several measures:

1. Promote a better understanding of the arm's length relationship with government

There are many misconceptions with the arts and culture sector and beyond about the arm's length relationship with government. The Council as a part of the federal government is subject to many government policies such as the Official Languages Act, the Access to Information and Privacy policies, the Financial Administration Act etc. The arm's length relationship bestows upon the Council the ability to exercise judgments of an artistic and professional nature without political influence. This freedom does not exempt the Council from conforming to the broad policy directives of the government of the day.

The specific decisions regarding grant recipients and the amount of the grant are determined at arm's length, through the peer assessment process and by their very nature are essential to the credibility of the Council within the sector and within government. The Council has a long experience in the administration of the peer assessment process and should be seen at its greatest promoter and defender.

A sustained effort by the Council to ensure that the arm's length relationship is better understood by the sector for both its strengths and limitations would do much to prevent misunderstandings about the complex relationship between the Canada Council and the federal government.

2. Ensure that any Strategic Plan be Firmly Rooted in the *Canada Council Act*

When Parliament passed the *Canada Council Act* in 1957, it conferred upon the Council an impressively broad mandate. While the first fifty years have been largely focused on Section 8(1) "to foster and promote the study and enjoyment of, and the production of works in, the arts" dimension of the mandate, the Council has the potential to use other dimensions of the Act to solidify and advance as a leader in the promotion, understanding and development of the arts in its many forms.

It is the view of the CCA that the *Canada Council Act* must be central to a repositioning of the leadership role of the Council. It is the standard against which the performance of the Council is assessed by Parliament and it confers legitimacy on the activities undertaken on behalf of the arts sector.

The *Act* goes on to empower the Council to;

- 8(1) (a) assist, cooperate with and enlist the aid of organizations the objects of which are similar to any of the objects of the Council;
- (b) provide, through appropriate organizations or otherwise, for grants, scholarships or loans to persons in Canada for the study or research in the arts in Canada or elsewhere or to persons in other countries for study or research in the arts in Canada;
- (c) make awards to persons in Canada for outstanding accomplishments in the arts;
- (d) arrange for and sponsor exhibitions, performance and publications of works in the arts;

- (f) exchange with other countries or organizations therein knowledge and information respecting the arts; and
- (g) arrange for representation and interpretation of Canadian arts in other countries.

While much energy is expended in the granting process within the Council, more attention should be directed to seeing how the Council could and should evolve to better reflect the changes in the arts sector, the population of Canada and public policies affecting the interests of artists, creators, arts organizations, and arts professionals.

The Council can demonstrate its leadership by addressing how each of the six other dimensions of the mandate can be adapted to the current state of evolution

of both the sector and the broader areas of core priorities identified in “Creating our future”.

3. The Canada Council as a knowledge organization

8(1) b addresses an early observation that the Council reaffirms its mission as a knowledge organization and develops a comprehensive and coherent research program harnessing internal and external resources. As the Council broadens and deepens its research and analysis capacity, it will signal national leadership in the understanding of how the arts work, evolve, and engage Canadians.

Recognizing this requires the development of a research and information strategy for inclusion in the Strategic Plan of the Council. Difficult decisions would be required to decide whether to bolster the internal capacity of the Council in this area or to develop a program to support the work of independent researchers, academics and other interested professionals.

A coherent research strategy would further affirm the leadership of the Council as the source of the most current and comprehensive research on the historic, current and future state of the arts in Canada. The Council must differentiate this function from activities supported by other granting councils such as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. While it is possible that the Council could work with other granting councils on research projects, the integrity of its research mandate given by Parliament must remain inviolate and effective.

4. The international dimension to the Council’s mandate

In a globalized world, the Council has a great opportunity to engage more significantly at the international level. In the past, much of the international dimension of the Council’s mandate was delegated to the Canadian Commission on UNESCO; however, there are other possibilities for increased engagement internationally. Such informed and rigorous involvement would enhance the reputation of the Council as a leader both nationally and internationally. The Council has an opportunity to work with the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Canadian Heritage as a leader in promoting awareness of Canadian arts and culture around the world.

Conclusion

The Canada Council for the Arts has reached its fiftieth anniversary with a remarkable string of achievements. With the assistance and partnership of the Council, Canadian artists, creators, arts organizations and arts professionals have been part of one of the uncelebrated triumphs of our national life. In fifty short years, the Canadian cultural sector is one of the fastest growing sectors in

Canadian Conference of the Arts
July 5, 2007

the Canadian labour market. Our artists and creators have won distinction at home and around the world for the excellence and originality of their work.

The Canadian Conference of the Arts (CCA) renews its commitment to the Canada Council for the Arts as a major source of knowledge, understanding and support of the arts sector. In undertaking this strategic planning process, it is our hope that the Council can play an even stronger and broader role in the years to come as a true national leader in the arts