

PAARC

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Brief to the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services 2017 Pre-Budget Consultations

Presented on behalf of the Pacific Association of Artist-Run Centres (PAARC)
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October 14, 2016
Vancouver, BC

Member Organizations:

221A Artist-Run Centre
Access Gallery
Alternator Centre for Contemporary Art
Arnica Artist-Run Centre
Artspeak
Balcone
Cineworks
Dynamo Arts Association
Gallery Gachet
Gam Gallery
grunt gallery
LIVE Biennale
Malaspina Printmakers Society
Ministry of Casual Living

New Forms Festival
Open Space
Or Gallery
Other Sights for Artists' Projects Association
Oxygen Art Centre
Project Space
Projectile Publishing Society / Fillip Review
UNIT/PITT Projects
VIVO Media Arts Centre
Western Front
Xchanges Artists' Gallery & Studios
Yactac Gallery

This brief is presented to the Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services by the Pacific Association of Artist Run Centres (PAARC) on behalf of its 26 member organizations, which are located in Vancouver, Victoria, Kamloops, Kelowna and Nelson.

The Pacific Association of Artist Run Centres (PAARC)

PAARC represents artist-run centres in British Columbia. Artist-run centres are non-profit organizations working in the fields of visual and media arts that present non-commercial and experimental artwork, and are geared towards the benefit of the practicing artist. Artist-run centres support professional artists at all stages of their careers, pay professional artist fees, and employ cultural workers and administrators. Since the early 1970s, artist-run centres in Canada have formed regional, national and international networks. The majority of Canada's internationally recognized visual and media artists have emerged from the artist-run centre movement.

Artist-run centres are vital to the artistic community

Artist-run centres (ARCs) provide essential services to the members of the cultural community. These services are fostered through peer-to-peer engagement including socio-professional networking opportunities and access to artistic distribution and production resources and support. Artist-run centres constitute key components of the Canadian visual art system; they provide community-engaged programs and activities, support the development of artists' and cultural workers' careers, and foster artistic innovation.

Over the years, the BC artistic community has greatly contributed to the development of the Canadian artist-run centre network, notably with the foundation of the first artist-run centre in Canada, Intermedia Society, in 1967 in Vancouver. While in operation for only a few years, Intermedia inspired artists throughout the country to self-organize and found artist-run centres in their communities. Today, some of the oldest Canadian artist-run centres are still in operation in BC; some of our members have recently celebrated over 40 years of operations!

Contributions of Artist-Run centres to the cultural sector in BC

Artist-run centres allow for the possibility of developing or incubating new practices and encounters across cultural practitioners, artistic practices, and audiences. This manifests through **facilitating artists' practices, educating and cultivating discourse around artistic practices, and developing audiences for artists' works**, for example through artist talks, publications, web applications, and inter-organizational partnerships. Characteristics that distinguish BC ARCs from other visual and media art organizations are as follows:

- board makeup of a minimum 51% artists
- commitment to paying professional artists' fees and living wages for artists and cultural workers
- support of experimental practices, processes, and discourses
- support for the development of artists' practices and careers

BC ARCs are actively involved in national and international networks of like-minded organizations. The international distribution of artists' films and videos, and participation in national and international book fairs are concrete examples of the ways in which artist-run centres contribute to **growing audiences for the work of BC artists outside of the province's territory**.

Artist-run centres work toward adequate pay for curatorial and administrative staff, in addition to being committed to paying artists equitably for the work they accomplish and exhibit by abiding to national payment fee schedules and advocating on behalf of artists for the continued necessity to provide a living wage to professional artists and cultural workers.

Artist-run centres provide **mentorship and stewardship for younger artists and cultural workers**. Many artist-run centres in the province have youth-engagement programs and collaborate with local universities to expand their curricula by offering internships and practicum opportunities. In the last years, many of our member organizations have notably benefitted from the BC Arts Council's Early Career Development Program.

Current Challenges faced by Artist-Run Centres in BC

The Pacific Association of Artist-Run Centres commissioned a province-wide sectoral study (see appendix) to analyze the impacts of recent changes to provincial cultural policies and funding instruments on British Columbia artist-run centres' ability to remain financially and operationally viable while maintaining their core values and mandates. **Low levels of operating funding and proportionally high levels of project funding provided by the BC Arts Council as well as the instability of funding received by our members (particularly from Gaming Policy and Enforcement Branch Community Grant allocations) are among the areas of analysis that we would like to bring to your attention.**

BC Arts Council support

The study makes a strong case for increased granting from the BC Arts Council, notably through an expanded operating funding pool and robust core funding. With operating grant averages lower than elsewhere in the country and only half of our membership receiving operating funding from the Council, there is a clear demonstration of need for additional core funding.

Operating and project funding allocated to our members represent similar proportions of total public funding received (12% and 9% respectively). This situation is unique to BC and, while project funding is essential to the development of innovative initiatives, it does not allow for the organizational stability that is needed to sustain organizations, grow community outreach, expand human resources in the sector, and respond to the growing demands for services needed by a new generation of artists.

In recent years, the province has made significant investments to support a new generation of artists, cultural workers, and creative agents. The BC Arts Council's Early Career Development Program, investments in the new Emily Carr University campus, and efforts to engage communities through the BC Creative Futures strategy testify to the government's commitment to making art and culture accessible to the next generation of British Columbians. Increased operating funding is the only way to ensure the health and continued growth of artist-run centres in the province, which act as stepping-stones for young artists and cultural workers' careers.

Key facts about BC Arts Council grants to artist-run centres

- All other provinces with available data from ARCs reporting through Canadian Arts Data (CADAC) demonstrate significantly higher operating support through their provincial funders (except New Brunswick, where operating support is not available through an arts council).
- In the last years, operating grants allocated to BC ARCs have been unstable and amounts have fluctuated, impeding organizations' ability to plan for the future and develop initiatives to ensure their sustainability and continued innovation.
- Low levels of operating support for ARCs have resulted in a high level of dependence on Project money. Relative to their counterparts in other provinces, BC ARCs reporting through CADAC receive relatively high levels of Project funding. Project grant contributions in 2014 for CADAC-reporting BC ARCs are proportionately greater than any other year surveyed, at 9.11% of public sector revenue and 5.94% of total revenue.
- Only 50% of organizations in PAARC's membership received operating assistance from the BC Arts Council in 2015-16.

Community Gaming Grants Support

The study has shown that median Gaming grants attributed to our members have diminished since 2008 and funding is unstable from year to year. Community Gaming Grant levels need to be brought back, at a minimum, to 2008 levels, and then increase if possible. Further, in an effort to diminish organizations' administrative burden and increase organizational stability, funding received through these grants must be made stable through multi-year funding processes. To increase transparency in the granting process and accountability to the artistic community, Arts and Culture Community Gaming Grants should be adjudicated through a process informed by rigorous peer evaluation, such as that already in place at the BC Arts Council.

Key facts about Community Gaming grants to artist-run centres

- Between 2008 and 2014 PAARC members' Gaming grant averages decreased by \$9837, which represents a 26% decrease in funding.
- In the last years, Community Gaming grants allocated to BC ARCs have been unstable and amounts have fluctuated. Lack of stable funding that a formalized multi-year granting process would secure precludes artist-run centres in BC from planning for the future and developing initiatives to ensure their sustainability and continued innovation.

Need for increased investment in arts and culture in BC

In its 2016 pre-budget consultation report, the Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services stated that it "acknowledges the significant social and economic benefits associated with the provision of a vibrant and dynamic arts, sports and cultural sector for the province." The recommendations put forward in the past years to increase investment in the cultural sector are aligned with economic priorities that have been identified by the current government, notably the creation of sustainable jobs and investment in sectors that actively participate in the knowledge economy.

This increased financial support is particularly important at this time because the federal government has planned for significant investments in Canadian Arts and Culture, including substantial increases to the Canada Council for the Arts' budget between the 2016-17 and the 2020-21 fiscal years, and the Cultural Spaces Fund's budget between the 2016-17 and the 2017-2018 fiscal years. This is great news for all Canadians, including British Columbia residents, artists, cultural workers, and arts organizations. However, this does not mean that the need for increased provincial funding is alleviated.

On the contrary, increases to the Canada Council's and the Cultural Spaces Fund's budgets put pressure on the BC Arts Council and the province of British Columbia to follow suit so that arts organizations and artists remain competitive on the national scale and are able to access this potential source of expanded financial support. Organizations that receive substantial provincial support are at an advantage when applying for funding at the national level. Effectively, not only do they have more financial resources to develop innovative programming, support cutting-edge artists, and engage communities, they are also able to demonstrate substantive provincial backing. With consistently low per-capita investment to the cultural sector, BC is at a disadvantage when it comes to securing federal funding to support its activities.

Increased investment in the arts is aligned with economic priorities that have been identified by the current government, notably the creation of sustainable jobs and investment in sectors that actively participate in the knowledge economy. British Columbia is the Canadian province with the highest number of working artists; they comprise 1.8% of the province's labour force. The city of Vancouver is the Canadian metropolis with the highest percentage of artists, which comprise 2.3% of its labour force.¹ BC is also second in rank amongst the provinces with 3.65% of its labour force being comprised of cultural workers. Together, artists and cultural workers account for 5.45% of the province's labour force.²

Recommendations for the 2017 BC Budget

The following recommendations are aligned with those of the Professional Arts Alliance of the Greater Victoria and the Alliance for Arts and Culture:

Recommendation 1

Double the investment in the BC Arts Council so that: a) BC artists have the same opportunities as artists in other provinces; b) BC arts organizations can provide access to underserved communities; c) the Council can provide stable, multi-year funding to arts, culture and heritage organizations;

Recommendation 2

Restore gaming grant levels to 2008 levels and provide incremental increases as gaming revenues increase;

Recommendation 3

Invest in a **cultural facilities infrastructure program** to enable BC organizations to leverage federal funding from the Department of Canadian Heritage;

Recommendation 4

Increase funding for **arts education** to enable access for youth;

Recommendation 5

Increase investment in the cultural sector so that everyone in BC can have meaningful engagement with culture, including access to thought-provoking visual and media arts, and that artists, cultural workers, and organizations can continue to foster the development of a dynamic, diverse, and rich cultural offer.

We thank you for taking our recommendations into consideration and for taking into account ways to address the specific needs of the artistic community in BC. Further we would like to thank the Committee for the recommendations it has made in the last three years following pre-budget consultation processes, i.e. increased investments to the cultural sector in response to the cultural sector's repeated expression of concerns regarding the adequacy of provincial support for arts and culture in BC. It is our hope that this year again your recommendations for the 2017 BC Budget will follow this line of thought given that the implementation of these measures is vital to our community.

Appendix

Please find attached the Sectoral Study Report on BC Artist-run Centres, "PAARC Leadership for Change Sectoral Research," published by the Pacific Association of Artist-Run Centres, February 2016.

References

¹ *Mapping Artists and Cultural Workers in Canada's Large Cities*, Hill Strategies, February 2010. Table 1, p. 7.

² *British Columbia's cultural climate: Understanding the arts in BC's Economy and Society*, Hill strategies, Presentation commissioned by the Alliance for Arts and Culture Society, June 21, 2012.