

Arts and Minds

A Collaborative Report on the Arts in Ottawa



*Based on Paul Dewar's
community consultations
on arts and culture*

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SUMMARY

The following report outlines some of the key, shared concerns of over 150 participants in an Arts Summit held in Ottawa on November 7, 2009, organized by Paul Dewar, MP, Ottawa Centre. The Summit's findings are addressed under five key areas: Alleviating Artist Poverty, Supporting and Promoting Art Education, Ensuring Sustainable Arts Funding, Developing Ottawa's Arts and Cultural Reputation and Creating Canada's Vision for the Arts.

Each key area contains specific recommendations for action and improvement.

INTRODUCTION

Securing stable and sustainable funding for the arts sector has always been a challenge. With the economic crisis, arts and cultural funding has taken more of a hit. What governments easily forget is how integral the arts and culture industry is to our national and local economies and identities. In its report, “Valuing Culture: Measuring and Understanding Canada’s Creative Economy,” the Conference Board of Canada presents a comprehensive study of the direct and indirect impacts of the arts and culture industry on Canada’s economy. The report examines the impact a dynamic cultural sector has on attracting talent and catalyzing economic prosperity. The Conference Board of Canada placed the real value-added output of cultural industries at \$46 billion in 2007. The report also finds that the economic footprint of the cultural sector was approximately \$84.6 billion that same year. That is 7.4% of Canada’s total GDP, and 1.1 million jobs. Cultural diversity is an important driver for a creative economy, an important strength that contributes to national competitiveness. Moreover, for Canada, cultural development helps to bridge geographical distances, creates communities of interest and helps us embrace the breadth of our diversity. The arts allow Canadians to express themselves and help define who we are as a country and a people. A strong cultural policy is the pillar of any national identity and integral to preserving our heritage.

The Arts Summit

On Saturday, November 7, 2009, I hosted a town hall with community groups and residents of Ottawa Centre on their ideas for improving the state of the arts and culture in Ottawa, and in Canada more generally. The purpose of the event, in addition to gaining insights into the concerns of the community, was to give citizens an opportunity to present their ideas and visions for how they wish to transform and improve their community, so that I may present these ideas to the House of Commons.

With over 150 participants and representatives from numerous community groups, as well as those who participated by hosting their own Kitchen Table Conversations and who wrote and called in with their ideas, the Arts Summit allowed us as a community to gather wide-ranging knowledge and insight on where we are and where we want to go.

During the first hour of the event the group heard from two individuals who presented the history and development of Ottawa’s arts community in its efforts to grow and advocate on behalf of artists. Peter Honeywell, Executive Director of the Council for the Arts in Ottawa, award-winning artist and director on the Board of Community

Arts Ontario, and Susan Annis, Executive Director of the Cultural Human Resources Council, former Director of Canadian Conference of the Arts and current Chair of the Ottawa Arts Court Foundation, spoke to the advocacy work done by the collective arts community since the 1980s, and some of the achievements and challenges along the way. Peter's and Susan's experience, shared by many in the room, was a great starting point for where we need to go as a community, and where our strengths and weaknesses lie.

After the presentations, we moved into group discussions, where participants brainstormed about their priorities for the arts in Ottawa, some of the key challenges that need to be addressed and how the government could go about doing so. We closed the day off with presentations from each group on their top priorities and agreed to put the ideas into a report, which would be used to help inform my work as an elected representative and which would also be shared with the greater community, the City of Ottawa and particularly the newly established Parliamentary Arts Caucus.

As an elected representative, it is my firm belief that the ideas that are best able to improve our community come from its citizens, whose experiences should inform government policies.

The following report outlines some of the key, shared concerns of participants of the Arts Summit, which are addressed under five key areas: Alleviating Artist Poverty, Supporting and Promoting Art Education, Ensuring Sustainable Arts Funding, Developing Ottawa's Arts and Cultural Reputation and Creating Canada's Vision for the Arts.

Alleviation of Artist Poverty

The term "starving artist" is not an exaggerated stereotype of the common artist; it is a reality for many Canadians whose work is undervalued in our society and who are without a social safety net. The theme of poverty, which plagues the arts community in many ways and both arts organizations and artists themselves, was very present throughout the Summit.

1. RESTRUCTURING TAX SYSTEMS

- A.** Income averaging for artists (*federal and provincial governments*)
- B.** Increase the threshold for taxable income for the self-employed (*federal and provincial governments*)
- C.** Create an opportunity for self-employed artists to use Employment Insurance (*federal and provincial governments*)

D. Increase support for affordable housing projects in Ottawa (*municipal governments*)

2. INCREASING DEMAND

A. Allow artists to receive a tax write-off for art donations (e.g., pictures, paintings, tickets to productions, shows, etc.) (*federal and provincial governments*)

B. Provide tax incentives for individuals as well as corporations who purchase art (*federal and provincial governments*)

C. Government procurement of art should prioritize locally produced art whenever possible (*federal, provincial and municipal governments*)

3. SUPPORT FOR SENIORS

A. Allow self-employed artists to contribute to the Canada Pension Plan (*federal government*)

B. Create a subsidized retirement centre for senior artists in Ottawa, including work and performance/exhibition space for artists (*provincial and municipal governments*)

Supporting and Promoting Art Education

An integral part in creating strong support for the arts is to encourage young people to find and embrace their talents so that we can develop a creative workforce and population. In addition, art education is a necessary first step in audience development. By improving cultural literacy we can expand private support and appreciation for the arts. The best way to improve how our society interacts and grows is to ensure that our children are well educated and have the tools to develop and express themselves.

1. The government should improve funding to elementary and secondary school arts programs by increasing funding for supplies and facilities (*federal and provincial governments*)

2. The government should ensure that students are taught art by qualified art teachers; art classes should be incorporated as an integral part of the core curriculum (*federal and provincial governments*)

3. Tax credits should be provided to parents who enrol their children in art lessons outside school in order to improve access for families to art education and support art education organizations.

Ensuring Sustainable Arts Funding

Lack of government support and funding for the arts has crippling effects on the arts sector. Governments need to work in partnership with the arts community to ensure that funding is effective and sustainable. Moreover, government funding of the arts, on the whole, should be *depoliticized* and made permanent.

1. Funding to the Canadian Council for the Arts should be increased and sustained (*federal government*)
2. Government grants should be directed to the “capacity-building” of arts organizations and groups, not discretionary programs (*federal, provincial and municipal governments*)
3. Government needs to invest in creating and improving spaces for artists to do and present their work (*federal, provincial and municipal governments*)
 - A. Subsidizing the cost of new facilities, such as new studio space, theatres, public displays, etc.
 - B. Funding improvements to aging infrastructure
 - C. Government should provide greater subsidies for venues to support local festivals and showcases and to encourage the development of new festivals
 - D. Communities should incorporate the arts in the urban and long-term planning (*municipal government*)

Developing Ottawa’s Arts & Culture Reputation

Ottawa’s reputation as an arts and culture scene is non-existent. There is a need for local and national governments to promote and bolster the reputation of the national capital as a place to be for arts and culture. There is no reason why Ottawa cannot develop a reputation as a world-class capital for the arts.

1. The City of Ottawa should work in partnership with the arts community to brand the city as an arts hub and promote the work and exhibition of local artists and cultural organizations. The ncc should play an active role. (*federal and municipal governments*)
2. National galleries and museums should be free and thus accessible to all members of the public (*federal government*)

Creating Canada's Vision for the Arts

The common theme throughout the Summit was the need to address Canada's lack of a long-term vision for its arts sector. The arts need to be a proactive priority for government and not subject to the volatility of short-term political persuasions. Rather, Canada needs a comprehensive plan making the preservation and promotion of arts and culture in Canada a key government policy.

1. Canada should pass legislation outlining the role of arts and culture in Canada's federal system and specifying support for the Canadian Council for the Arts, as well as Heritage Canada (*federal government*)
2. The Canadian government should be an advocate for the arts by creating a public awareness campaign to encourage public engagement in arts and culture (*federal government*)