

A large outdoor festival scene with a crowd and dancers on stage. The background shows a large, multi-story building with many windows. In the foreground, a group of dancers in white, long-sleeved, polka-dot outfits are performing on a stage. A drum set is visible in the bottom right corner. The sky is a mix of orange and blue, suggesting sunset or sunrise. The overall atmosphere is vibrant and festive.

Reset. *RENEW.* Revitalize.

A Strategic Plan for the
Ontario Arts Council
2022–2027



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO

an Ontario government agency
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario



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FRONT COVER: Members of the Reign Yash Dance Academy perform during monstrARTity's #BollywoodMonster Mashup in Mississauga's Celebration Square. (Photo: Captive Camera)

INSIDE COVER: Esmaa Mohamoud's *The Brotherhood FUBU (For Us, By Us)* installation at Westin Harbour Castle Conference Centre in Toronto. (Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid)

Preface

Right across Ontario, from large urban centres to close-knit rural communities, the arts exemplify the qualities that give this province its richness and diversity. They enable us to express ourselves and forge connections, exchange ideas and access opportunities to learn, gather, celebrate and be challenged. Prior to the pandemic, 86 per cent of Ontarians indicated that they were attending live arts events or performances annually.¹

And precisely because they do play such a central role in the lives of so many people, the arts are also a crucial driver of the province's economic success, providing employment and opportunities for a broad range of creative people, attracting tourism and nourishing local businesses. Arts and culture output represents \$27 billion or 3.4 per cent of the province's gross domestic product and accounts for

254,985 jobs, which is 3.8 per cent of total Ontario employment.²

But the arts also exist within and reflect the larger forces that shape societies. Artists have long enabled their communities to understand far-reaching changes, and we are reminded of this critical role in periods such as this one, a time marked by polarization, health and environmental crises, and a growing awareness of the critical

importance of addressing past and ongoing injustices.

The Ontario Arts Council (OAC), through its role as the provincial government's primary funder of artistic activity in Ontario, recognizes the salience of this moment and has embarked on a process of major change in order to address critically important issues in both society and the arts – reconciliation, inclusion and technological change.

¹EnviroNics Research Group (2017, August). *Arts and Heritage Access and Availability Survey 2016–17*. Department of Canadian Heritage and Canada Council for the Art. https://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/200/301/pwgsc-tpsgc/por-ef/canadian_heritage/2017/051-16-e/index.html

²Statistics Canada (2022, June). Table 36-10-0452-01 *Culture and sport indicators by domain and sub-domain, by province and territory, product perspective (x 1,000)*. <https://doi.org/10.25318/3610045201-eng>



Soprano Noriko Hashimoto (*left*) and dancer and choreographer Takako Segawa perform in *Sho ga nai* at the Dominion Arboretum in Ottawa. (Photo: Sarolta Gyoker)

Context

Prior to the pandemic, we saw steady growth in the number of artists and arts professionals paid fees or salaries through OAC-funded activities (from 57,001 in 2014–15 to 69,201 in 2018–19, a 21 per cent increase) as well as encouraging growth in public participation in the arts. The number of public events and activities produced by OAC-funded artists and arts organizations in their home communities grew 16 per cent, from 37,037 in 2014–15 to 43,104 in 2018–19, while total audience rose 25 per cent, from 17.1 million in 2014–15 to 21.4 million in 2018–19.³

During the COVID-19 pandemic, OAC has continued to fund artists and arts organizations in order to provide much-needed support at a time when other sources of revenue were significantly diminished. More broadly, the pandemic has revealed deep social inequities and increased precarity for many, including those working in the arts.

What is clear is that we have entered a period of significant cultural transition due to sweeping changes in the social, environmental and technological landscapes. The careers of artists and cultural workers have been profoundly disrupted, even as they continue to create and innovate and respond to these much broader changes.

As has been the case throughout previous periods of upheaval, the arts will play a major role in helping Ontarians recover from the pandemic and thrive. In terms of our role as a public funder, OAC will renew its programs and processes to reflect what we've all experienced. We will develop even more equitable and accessible ways of supporting diverse, underserved and marginalized communities.

For example, the proportion of grant applications from racialized artists/arts organizations grew by 41 per cent between 2014–15 (22 per cent) and 2021–22 (31 per cent). Reflecting this increase, OAC grants to racialized artists and arts organizations have also grown and accounted for just

over a third (34 per cent) of all grants in 2021–22. The OAC's goal continues to be to ensure that the proportion of grants meets or exceeds the percentage of applications from racialized artists and arts organizations.

We believe that programs and processes must be regularly renewed to ensure that diverse, underserved and marginalized communities are assured equitable, consistent and accessible ways to connect with OAC and benefit from its funding. The new strategic plan embraces this goal while also acknowledging that we must carry out far-reaching changes to our own approaches in order to achieve our aspirations.

³The figures above only go to 2018–19 because the information from organizations that receive OAC operating funding comes through the Canadian Arts Data (CADAC), and there is a two-year lag in obtaining final data.



Festival goers listen to a reading at the Eden Mills Writers' Festival. (Photo: Dan Harasymchuk)

These include:

Digital Acceleration

The pandemic compelled artists and arts organizations to quickly adapt in order to continue to deliver programming, exhibit art and perform virtually. The OAC saw significant increases in the activities produced and presented on digital platforms among the organizations it supports through operating grants. Digital acceleration provides new modes of creative expression and opportunities to disseminate artistic work, but it also raises many important issues for artists and arts organizations related to access, sustainable business models and fair compensation.

Indigenous Reconciliation

The OAC respects Indigenous creative expression and worldviews centred on cultural self-determination and recognizes the diversity, vitality and importance of Indigenous languages and cultural and artistic practices. In support of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, OAC seeks to advance reconciliation through its support of Indigenous arts and arts organizations and expand its relationships with Indigenous communities. The OAC continues to be guided by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Land Acknowledgement

As an agency of the Government of Ontario, OAC recognizes that this province is home to Indigenous Peoples as well as other diverse communities: settlers and newcomers who colonized this territory, those who have been displaced—whether from their traditional territories or from their home countries—and the descendants of those forcibly brought to this continent.

The OAC's Toronto office is located on the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat Peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples.

The OAC further recognizes the duty that we, as inhabitants, have in understanding our relationship to the land and our place within its history. In particular, OAC recognizes its responsibility to collaborate with Indigenous colleagues as well as Indigenous assessors, artists, organizations and the other stakeholders that we serve.

Finally, OAC understands that a land acknowledgment is a living statement, which evolves and has meaning each time it is expressed.

Francophone Arts

Francophones have special constitutional status within Canada. In 1968, the Ontario government commissioned professor and OAC board member Roger Saint-Denis to lead a study on the state of Francophone arts in the province. As a result of *La vie culturelle des Franco-Ontariens* (better known

as the Saint-Denis report), OAC established the Franco-Ontarian office in January 1970. Over time, Ontario's investment in the Francophone arts sector has helped create a strong and distinct artistic voice. It is a commitment that is enduring and will carry into the future.



Indigenous Arts

The OAC has a long-standing relationship with Indigenous arts in Ontario, beginning with support to Indigenous organizations in the early 1970s, followed by the first program for Indigenous artists, the Crafts and Native Arts program launched in 1982.

In 1996, in consultation with Indigenous artists, OAC developed a suite of programs to reflect the Indigenous arts community across the province and established a standalone section with an Indigenous arts officer.

The road to reconciliation begins with truth, illustration by Mishi:kenh Kwe/ Autumn Smith.

The red symbol in the sky is inspired by Anishinaabe pictographs and represents the path to reconciliation expressed by a turtle who symbolizes truth. The people embody Orange Shirt Day. The moon and stars represent both survivors of the residential school system and the Sixties Scoop who passed down their stories, teachings and cultural knowledge in spite of hardships, as well as those who did not survive.



Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Ontario is Canada's most populous and culturally diverse province. Guided by this plan, OAC will ensure that equity is embedded at the heart of everything we do: our policies, programs, operations and practices.

Elder Richard Meilleur engages with children from one of Collège Boréal's early childhood centres in Sudbury. (Photo: Ariane Clément)

Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities in Canada have unique histories, challenges and modes of creative and cultural expression. In order to embed these understandings in our processes, OAC will work closely with Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities and creators.

In *Vital Arts and Public Value*, our previous strategic plan, OAC committed to ensuring equitable access for all Ontarians, with particular emphasis on six priority groups: Francophone artists, Indigenous artists, artists and arts organizations located in regions across Ontario, artists of colour, Deaf artists and artists with disabilities, and new generation artists (18–30 years old).

With this new strategic plan — *Reset. Renew. Revitalize.* — OAC deepens its commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion. The plan includes the specific priority groups and further embeds equity into the granting framework. The OAC has a responsibility to ensure that Ontario’s abundant diversity is fully reflected in the artistic activity it supports. This deepened commitment to equity requires a flexible approach and will be reflected in OAC’s granting framework. We will also constantly assess and reassess how we are doing.

Given that equity is at the core of all aspects of OAC’s work, each of the strategic directions detailed in this plan will establish concrete goals to address the systemic barriers that exist in the production and presentation of the arts. This fundamental shift will take time to implement. While the new strategic plan launches this journey, we expect it will take more than a year for OAC’s programs to fully reflect the transition.

Building principles of equity throughout OAC will support meaningful and genuine forms of diversity, equity and inclusion.

We will:

- identify new and enhanced funding strategies as well as application and assessment processes that support and deepen our equity goals;
- amplify the impact, benefits, and value of the arts to promote equity, diversity, inclusion, access and social equality;
- find innovative ways to design programs and deliver services in order to remove the barriers identified by equity-deserving communities that restrict or limit access to OAC funding and participation in the arts;

Building principles of equity throughout OAC will support meaningful and genuine forms of diversity, equity and inclusion.

- maximize the impact of our activities on equity-deserving groups by cultivating the connections, collaborations and partnerships that sustain artists, arts organizations and communities. In doing so, we will strengthen engagement with historically and currently underserved groups through enhanced research, communication and outreach activities.

Strategic *Direction 1*

Further develop our funding approach to build strength and relevance

The OAC will develop its funding approach to be in step with the wider transformation occurring in the arts sector, as part of our core response to growing demands for a more equitable society. We will pursue new organizing principles and sustainable ways of building the infrastructure needed to support new capacity for equity action in public funding.

Goals

- Develop OAC's funding approach to meaningfully centre artistic practices and equitable outcomes.
- Renew organizational and granting policies and processes through an equity lens.
- Support and champion digital and environmental initiatives to ensure equity and sustainability.
- Emphasize the economic and quality-of-life benefits that communities rich in arts activity bring to the province.

Strategic *Direction 2*

Amplify the impact, benefits and value of the arts

The OAC believes deeply in building communities where the arts are not only central but enable more people to share in the creativity, connection and endless possibilities offered by cultural and artistic experiences. To achieve this goal, OAC will highlight the work of artists through diverse stories and gather data that demonstrates the impact of the arts on Ontario's economic well-being and the quality of life of its residents.

Goals

- Amplify the diverse stories of Ontario's artists and arts organizations.
- Collect and share data about the impact and value of the arts.
- Tell new stories about the value of the arts in society and OAC's role in supporting them.
- Demonstrate the broad impact of public arts funding.



Haviah Mighty (*left*) and Omega Mighty perform for a crowd during the House of PainT Festival in Ottawa. (Photo: David Pistol)



From left: Leah Archambault, Liz Winkelaar, Maggie Shew and Jacqueline Ethier in *W(WE)*, a TAKE UP SPACE production presented during Fresh Meat at Arts Court in Ottawa. (Photo: Melody Maloney)

Strategic *Direction 3*

Renew program design and service delivery

The OAC will ensure that its programs are relevant, equitable and accessible through regular and rigorous review. Program innovations and process improvements are necessary to maximize the impact of grants on recipient artists and arts organizations. The OAC also wants applicants to feel that their interactions throughout the grant process have been fair and respectful.

Goals

- Expand capacity for innovation, learning and adaptation in OAC's granting and organizational processes.
- Collaborate with stakeholders to determine new and improved ways to make programs more accessible and accountable.
- Improve the experience of grant applicants and recipients.
- Regularly assess processes to ensure that equity is imbedded in all OAC's activities.

Strategic *Direction 4*

Cultivate connections, collaborations and partnerships

The OAC will cultivate connections, collaborations and partnerships in order to deepen its relationships with those it serves and enhance the impact of funding. The OAC will leverage its unique position as a funder to support artists and arts organizations in collaborating with other entities while also developing its own capacity for strategic partnerships. Finally, OAC will focus on fostering partnerships that emphasize the economic and quality of life benefits of the arts.

Goals

- Strengthen engagement with regional and equity-deserving groups.
- Support artists and arts organizations to develop collaborations and partnerships through programs and initiatives.
- Develop capacity for engaging in strategic partnerships with stakeholders within and outside the arts sector.
- Expand opportunities for connection and exchange among artists and arts organizations.

Julia Course (*left*) as the Honourable Gwendolen Fairfax, and Gabriella Sundar Singh as Cecily Cardew, in the Shaw Festival's performance of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. (Photo: David Cooper)

Overview of the Stakeholder Engagement Process

The strategic planning initiative began in January 2021, with the design of the stakeholder engagement process. The OAC's approach to engagement has been collaborative and iterative, aiming to place stakeholders at the centre of the process. The main components included external consultations with key stakeholders and internal consultations with staff and board members.



The external consultations were carefully designed to emphasize the voices of equity-deserving groups. We consulted 140 artists, arts workers and arts sector leaders through group sessions and one-on-one interviews. These took place throughout the spring and summer of 2021.

Our consultations focused on four themes: the current state of the arts sector, the current state of OAC, the future role of OAC and future trends. A comprehensive online survey was conducted in August and September 2021. The survey invitation was emailed to everyone on OAC's contact lists and produced 2,406 completed surveys.

The OAC's lead consultant for the strategic planning process was Overlap Associates. Additional consultants and facilitators supported stakeholder engagement through their experience with specific communities. These included PROCESS, Nordicity and Creative Users Projects.

To validate the findings from the consultations and survey, we conducted a large online community session in November 2021 to share and deepen our understanding of the key themes and gather new insights.

Overall, the consultations garnered substantial insights from those with unique perspectives on the challenges and opportunities facing the arts sector and OAC. We are grateful to all those who participated in the consultation process. It was clear from the level of engagement, including the rich and varied feedback, that people in Ontario care deeply about the arts.

How We Will Track Success

This strategic plan will be supported by operating plans that describe the objectives, tasks and resources to advance OAC's strategic goals. These plans will be guided by our strategic directions and goals.

Finally, OAC will develop a performance measurement framework to track and report on its progress. The results will be measured using quantitative and qualitative data. The OAC will report on its progress through its website and annual reports.

Our consultations focused on four themes: the current state of the arts sector, the current state of OAC, the future role of OAC and future trends.

Who We Are



Old Mother Tongue

SCENE	TAKE	ROLL
L/2-K	1	A007
DATE 09 21 2020	SOUND	
PROD.CO.	Michael Curtis	
DIRECTOR Mark Trifunovic		
CAMERA Michael D'Alfonso		

Our Mandate

The OAC fosters the creation and production of art for the benefit of all Ontarians. We champion and invest in the arts, helping artists and organizations to thrive, do their best work and reach as many audiences as they can.

Our Vision

We are ambitious for the arts and artists in Ontario. The arts are central to the lives of our communities. Everyone in the province should have the opportunity to share in the creativity, connection and belonging that the arts offer.

Our History

The Government of Ontario established the Ontario Arts Council in 1963 in order to support the growth and success of the province's arts community. Since then, OAC has developed granting programs to support a wide range of disciplines: craft, dance, literature, music, theatre, media arts and visual arts. Other OAC programs focus on activities such as multi and inter-arts, community-engaged arts, skills development, audience development, touring, distribution and dissemination.

In the late 1960s, OAC became one of the first provincial councils to recognize the importance of arts education. OAC initiatives in this

area have enabled Ontario school districts to build their own arts education programs.

Finally, in recognition of the special status that Indigenous Peoples and Francophones have within Canada, OAC has over the years developed programs specifically designed to elevate the arts within these communities.

Over the course of 60 years, OAC has consistently worked to develop and showcase Ontario's remarkable arts infrastructure and support the gifted creators whose imaginative work not only benefits the people of this province but extends far beyond its borders.

Our Approach

The OAC's staff administers more than 50 granting programs, and through its CEO and Chair, reports to the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. The 12-person volunteer board of directors — appointed by Ontario's Lieutenant Governor in Council — oversees OAC policies and governance. The OAC's staff and board hold themselves to a high standard, reflecting the public's expectation that we conduct our work fairly and effectively, with the goal of investing in projects and programs that offer the greatest benefits to Ontarians. It is also vitally important that OAC, as a public agency, demonstrates integrity, responsiveness, equity and accessibility in all aspects of its work.

The principle of peer assessment is fundamental to OAC. This approach to granting ensures that applications are evaluated by artists and arts professionals with relevant knowledge and experience.

The principle of peer assessment is fundamental to OAC. This approach to granting ensures that applications are evaluated by artists and arts professionals with relevant knowledge and experience. Peer assessment further ensures that OAC's decision-making process is transparent and accountable. The individuals who sit on OAC assessment panels reflect Ontario's cultural and regional diversity in order to bring the broadest possible perspective to funding decisions.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Actors Victoria Soo Lum (left) and Clarence Paulo Cansicio during the filming of a scene in *Old Mother Tongue*, a short film about Deaf identity by director Mark Trifunovic. (Photo: Leah Vlemmiks)

Ontario's *Diversity*

Ontario is Canada's most populous and culturally diverse province, with 14.2 million residents.⁴ Ontario has more than 250 ethno-cultural communities and half of Canada's newcomers live in this province.

About 3.9 million Ontarians identify themselves as members of visible minority groups,⁵ a figure that represents more than half of the Canadian residents who identify themselves as being part of a visible minority.⁶

The province is also home to nearly 630,000 individuals (5 per cent) who identify as Black⁷ and over 374,000 individuals (3 per cent) who identify as Indigenous.⁸ Ontario's Francophone population is the second largest in North America.

More than half of Canadian Francophones living outside Quebec reside in Ontario.⁹ Fifteen per cent of Ontarians — approximately 2.6 million people — live with disabilities.¹⁰ Lastly, there are nearly 2.4 million Ontarians, aged 18 to 30.¹¹

⁴Statistics Canada (2022). *Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population*. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>

⁵The term *visible minority* no longer accurately reflects the composition of some municipalities in Ontario; however, it is used here to be consistent with the term used in the 2016 Census of Population. The 2016 census defines visible minority according to the *Employment Equity Act*, which is "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour."

⁶Statistics Canada (2017). *Census Profile, 2016 Census of Population*. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸Government of Ontario (2018, March). *In the Spirit of Reconciliation: Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation's First 10 Years*. https://files.ontario.ca/books/in_spirit_of_reconciliation_pdf_0.pdf


⁹Canadian Heritage (2019). *Some facts on the Canadian Francophonie*. Government of Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/official-languages-bilingualism/publications/facts-canadian-francophonie.html>

¹⁰Government of Ontario (2021). *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act annual report 2019*. <https://files.ontario.ca/msaa-aoda-annual-report-2019-en-2021-05-18.pdf>

¹¹Statistics Canada (2022). Table 98-10-0020-01 *Age (in single years), average age and median age and gender: Canada, provinces and territories, census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations with parts*. <https://doi.org/10.25318/9810002001-eng>

Installation view of *Wrapped in Culture*, a travelling exhibition from the Ottawa Art Gallery, on display at the Thunder Bay Art Gallery. (Photo: Ashley Agostino)





INSIDE COVER: Guest artist
Shakura S'Aida rehearses with
the Windsor Symphony Orchestra.
(Photo courtesy of Windsor
Symphony Orchestra)

BACK COVER: Behind the scenes during
filming for Théâtre français de Toronto's
adaptation of *Les Liaisons dangereuses*.
(Photo: Mathieu Taillardas)

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