



EXPLORATION OF NOVA SCOTIA'S CULTURAL GRANT PROGRAMS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE OF THE EXPLORATION

Tara Taylor was engaged by Inspiring Communities' Weave East initiative to conduct an exploration of the Province of Nova Scotia's cultural arts grant programs. The purpose of the exploration is to:

- Evaluate the effectiveness and outreach of the current arts grant programs for creatives.
- Make recommendations for improvement which focus on opportunities to:
 - Better meet the needs of the community; and
 - Streamline administration of the programs.
 - The current criteria organizations and artists must meet for funding

PHASES OF THE EXPLORATION

I carried out this assignment in three phases. The primary objective of the first phase was to prepare a detailed exploration design which defined the field research that would be undertaken in the second phase of the study. The exploration design outlined the specific exploration issues, indicators, data sources, methodologies and question's that were used.

In the second phase of the study, I implemented a field research exercise which included:

- Interviews with 8 program officers from Halifax Regional Municipality, the Province and Canada Council (federal arts funder). In addition, 12 black artists province wide. The program officers are involved in the delivery and management of their departments current cultural / arts grants. (Specific grants: Diversity and CapaProvince grant; One Journey Initiative; Arts Nova Scotia, Canada Council for the Arts; Cultural Innovation Fund; Canada Healthy Communities Initiative; Black Business Initiative; Supporting Black Canadian Communities Initiative, Communities, Culture and Heritage, FACTOR Canada)
- A telephone, virtual survey and conversation was conducted with program officers and local artists. Many others, including arts organizations, sent in thoughts and answers to questions via email exchange. Response rates were higher amongst organizations that received multiple grants, particularly larger value grants and artists that were used to applying for grants.
- Email interviews with a sample of 14 individuals and organizations in the arts and cultural sector whose applications have been rejected or who have not applied to the grant and support programs in the past.
- Interviews with 7 other key stakeholders including representatives who have served on Assessment and jury Committees, representatives from other funding sources, and representatives of other organizations involved in the cultural sectors.

In the third phase of the study:

- Conducted two virtual sessions involving over 80 sector representatives to review the major findings of the field research and obtain recommendations on future direction of the grant programs based on the five priorities identified in the Culture Plan.

- Conducted interviews with municipal and provincial organizations involved in administering arts and culture grants in other jurisdictions to identify effective and efficient program design and delivery practices.
- Developed recommendations for changes to the structure and delivery of the arts and cultural grant programs.

OVERVIEW OF THE GRANT PROGRAMS

Characteristics of the cultural grant programs offered by Nova Scotia include:

- **Nova Scotia disbursed about \$7.8 million in grants in 2019-20 to 144 non-profit arts and cultural organizations and artists;** 65 to organizations, 9 ad hoc groups; 70 individual artists.
- **Nova Scotia offers a wide range of arts and cultural grant programs,** of which 15 were the subject of my review.
- **The funding is concentrated amongst a relatively small number of organizations.** The top 5 organizations that receive operational funding from Canada Council are Symphony Nova Scotia, 2B Theatre, the Art Gallery of NS, Centre for Art Tapes, and Nimbus Publishing; there are five more. Out of these 10, 9 are based in Halifax and one is in Windsor. The highest funded, Symphony Nova Scotia, receives \$800k and the next increment down is \$299.5K.
- **Few new organizations began receiving funding under the major programs during the past five years.** Most organizations receiving Operating funding, in fact the top 10 have very little to no representation from people of color. At least, the second highest funded arts organization, 2B Theatre, has hired a black Executive Director and made that position a designated one. For now, this intentional hiring practice is a must to get black and brown creatives on the playing field. The common knowledge in the arts community is that operating funds are frozen, indeed.

IMPACTS AND EFFECTS

This lack of access generates a variety of impacts.

- Does not increase the ability of underrepresented organizations to have capacity for growth, creation, producing, developing or disseminating their art / programs.
- No opportunity to leverage other funding
- Not able to increase artistic excellence
- Not able to increase community participation or public awareness of their art programs
- Not able to increase the level of diversity in art programming or creatives.
- Not able to explore / create meaningful collaborations among the organizations and creatives
- Extreme limitations on space to create, collaborate, and present

STRENGTHS UPON WHICH TO BUILD

- Nova Scotia has an **accomplished and resilient creative community**, including a strong base of non-profit arts and cultural organizations and a number of major, well-established cultural institutions that are recognized locally, nationally and internationally. The majority of these artists and organizations have gone UNSUNG for way too long. The impact of the creation in their communities is obviously in the lives of the consumers of their programming and creations.
- Nova Scotia is not as **strongly committed to its arts and cultural community as it can be**.
- The **program officers** are committed, experienced, highly capable and closely connected to the arts and cultural community in Nova Scotia. However, after taking in depth with several of the, their hands are tied in regards to making impactful changes to the delivery of their funding programs.
- The Province offers a **diverse mix of programs** providing support to a wide range of organizations from major arts organizations to emerging artists, arts groups and youth for a wide variety of purposes encompassing operating funding, projects, capital improvements, theatre rental, festivals and other events, planning and organizational development, creation of original artworks, and transit shelter advertising space. Where the lack exists is always the outreach piece to the broader arts community
- **Awareness of the programs is high amongst leading organizations**, many of who have longstanding relationships with the province. So perhaps a solution is to establish more trust and relations among underserved arts groups and individuals.

THE NEED FOR CHANGE

- **Ensuring that the programs are aligned with and will contribute directly to the achievement of the vision and goals of the Culture Plan.** Prior to development of the Culture Plan, there was no clearly defined strategic direction or focus for the grant programs. Over time, a complex range of programs developed which lacked coordination and focus. The adoption of the Culture Plan provides an opportunity to step back and refocus the programs on key priorities. However, even our Cultural Action plan left out the important contributions of grassroots / ad hoc groups.
- **Streamlining administration and delivery of the program to ensure that the available resources can focus on the priorities of the Culture Plan.** The existing application, assessment and adjudication processes are time consuming for juries and staff. Staff members spend significant amounts of time answering questions from potential applicants, providing guidance around application forms sometimes (depends on who it is), screening applications for eligibility, and supporting the adjudication process. Juries go over the applications and come together to discuss. If there are not many people on the jury and in the staff that are represented from underserved communities, a bias sneaks in final decisions. The application processes is very time consuming for applicants, particularly emerging or grassroots organizations, who commonly have limited resources available and may have little experience in developing applications. So, perhaps a solution can be a system implemented (like the Business Navigators) to assist with applications.

Reflecting these key issues, recommendations have been developed focusing on improving the program structure and enhancing program delivery.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN THE PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Recommendations regarding the program structure are as follows:

- Grant programs should take a more proactive and strategic approach to support development of the sector for underrepresented creatives, which focuses on strengthening the building blocks of the sector. The focus group and discussions highlighted the need to place emphasis on facilitating greater collaboration and exchange of ideas/expertise, encourage innovation in performances and operations, enhance professional development of both artists and administrators, improve audience development and outreach activities, develop shared/multipurpose infrastructure, strengthen infrastructure particularly at the neighbourhood/community level, and expand cultural learning opportunities.
- Consideration should be given to developing a mechanism to define clear funding priorities and review the allocation of grants against those priorities on an ongoing basis. The results of the industry workshops are an important first step in identifying priorities but a formal process needs to be established. Consideration should be given to establishing a planning process through which priorities are established and reviewed. The priorities will then be used to guide the exploration of grant applications. Before final recommendations are made to all levels of government, the overall allocation of funding could be reviewed against these priorities to determine any final adjustments that may be needed to better reflect the priorities established. For jury processes, the need to have members from equity seeking groups is crucial to even understand the depth of the message and story behind the art being submitted.
- Diversity needs to be placed at the forefront of the programs. The need for a distinct Diversity Initiatives program can be addressed by establishing diversity and support for emerging groups as a priority for the cultural grant and support programs overall. This will require defining successful outcomes for diversity, developing a clear definition and intent, and evaluating all grant applications against these outcomes. Efforts should be made to retain and incorporate successful components of the existing Diversity Initiatives program into the new program structure.
- The structure of the program or programs should be sufficiently broad to support a wide range of activities while flexible enough to allow for changes in priorities over time.
- To increase access and inclusiveness, the new program structure should also incorporate a broadened definition of eligible proponents. For example, the definition of eligible applicants could be broadened to consider applications from partnerships or collaborations between various groups within the industry as well as partnerships with non-arts groups (such as businesses, technology organizations, educational institutions etc. in and outside of Nova Scotia for effective outreach efforts) and unincorporated ad-hoc arts and cultural groups.
- Efforts to increase access and inclusiveness should be supported by increased outreach activities. More effort is required to increase awareness of the program amongst applicants, particularly emerging artists and new artists to the community, who have not applied in the past but whose activities are consistent with the vision, values and strategic themes of the Culture Plan. Resources will be required to develop and implement a formal outreach strategy.

- **A separate review process should be established for smaller grants versus larger grants.** In speaking with many Program Officers, they are very open to hearing new and innovative ideas, art, creation and will assist with figuring out the way that your proposal best fits their needs. Even though I have benefited from the “making if fit” assistance, it is not known to the majority of creators.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Area	Recommendations or Suggestions for Improvement
<p style="text-align: center;">Program Design/Delivery</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult the broader equity seeking arts and culture community and develop a cultural grants map in consultation with other funders to identify funding gaps as well as opportunities to reallocate provincial funds. Groups or activities that warranted support in the past may no longer require assistance and the level of support may need to be increased or decreased. • At present, older and established artists, arts and culture organizations with a track record are more likely to receive larger Province grants. This practice may put newer promising and impactful equity seeking artists/ organizations at a disadvantage. There is also little incentive for more established companies to work with emerging groups and artists with the exception of Diversity Initiatives grants which are limited to diverse communities. The Province should provide equal opportunities to both established and emerging organizations through its grant programs as well as promote more collaboration between the two groups. The Province should also put more focus in providing community cultural development support as emerging artists often start flourishing at the community level. • Provide audience development grants to arts and culture organizations. Investments in audience development can pay off in the long run as arts and culture organizations move away from Province grants and support toward more earned revenues. • Allow Operating grants to fluctuate considerably to more closely emulate the performance and growth patterns of the recipients. Provide recipients with advance notice as well as opportunity to improve performance in case of possible funding cuts. Develop a formal exit strategy to graduate existing Operating clients in order to make room for new clients. I feel like in the past 2 yrs, in the wake of the pandemic, this is being explored.

Area	Recommendations or Suggestions for Improvement
<p style="text-align: center;">Program Design/Delivery - Continued</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore whether distinct communities would be better served if diversity was adopted as one of the core principles across all the Province grant programs as opposed to having a stand-alone program. Arts Nova Scotia has added a diversity question to their grants and the applicant has to clearly spell out their plans to implement diversity into their work. • A Capital grant program (Supporting Black Communities Initiative) has been established exclusively for black organizations. This momentum needs to stay up until there is a healthy balance and one be created for arts and cultural organizations specifically.

Area	Recommendations or Suggestions for Improvement
<p>Eligibility Criteria/ Access to Funding</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand and/or revise current program eligibility criteria • Aboriginal arts and culture groups/organizations; • Youth arts and culture groups/organizations; • Festivals and events; • Multidisciplinary/collaborative projects/activities; • Emerging artists; and • Smaller arts and culture groups/organizations.
<p>Application and Adjudication Process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate uniform application and reporting forms with other funding organizations. For funder specific questions or information, use additional/separate pages. • Simplify the application forms in terms of both content and layout. The current forms are too cumbersome particularly in the context of the amount of funds available compared to other funding organizations. Make the application forms more user friendly by replacing the Excel forms with online applications. • Review the feasibility of eliminating multiple grant deadlines. Align Province fiscal year to the fiscal year of grant applicants and other funders.

Area	Recommendations or Suggestions for Improvement
<p>Application and Adjudication Process - Continued</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment Committee jurors from the arts and culture community should be chosen early so that they have time to attend cultural performances and events to obtain firsthand knowledge of the artistic merit and organizational competence of an applicant. • Review the rule that bars existing grant recipients from serving on any Assessment Committee as it limits the pool of potential jurors. • Make the arts community more involved in the assessment process and reduce staff decision-making role for the Municipality grants. Introduce arts jury/peer review assessment process like the Province does. • Adjust the grant approval time frame as some grant approval time frames do not give applicants adequate time to prepare/organize once their applications are approved and funds are disbursed by the Province.
<p>Outreach/ Communication</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider creating an Outreach Coordinator position and implementing an outreach plan to communicate grant information in a comprehensive and concerted manner. The outreach plan should clearly define all the target groups along with ways to reach them. Explore the possibilities of working together with arts schools and associations for outreach purpose, using more newspaper advertisements and grant information workshops/meetings, and adopting communication materials in other languages and/or simplified English. The outreach plan should also include ways to reach target groups other than potential grant recipients such as other funding sources and the general public. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand the email/newsletter communication system to cover arts and culture organizations that have not yet received funding from the Province in order to inform them about upcoming grants.

Area	Recommendations or Suggestions for Improvement
<p style="text-align: center;">Outreach/ Communication - Continued</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provincial program goals, eligibility criteria, assessment criteria, and exploration guidelines in simple and clear language to ensure consistency and avoid confusion. Elaborate on existing eligibility criteria so that an applicant can better determine what is the appropriate program or level of funding to apply for. • Make the nova scotia.ca website easier to navigate.