

Corporate Plan  
2011 – 16  
SUMMARY

# Strengthening Connections



Canada Council  
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts  
du Canada

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## Background

In 2007, the Canada Council for the Arts undertook one of its most significant formal strategic planning exercises, in consultation with its board, staff, the arts community, other arts councils and government departments, and a broad range of other stakeholders. The strategic plan that resulted — *Moving Forward 2008–11* — became the basis for the Council’s corporate plan for those years.

In its strategic and corporate plans, the Council:

- Reaffirmed that its **ultimate goal** is a vital and diverse arts sector that enriches the lives of Canadians – a goal to be reached by strengthening professional arts practice in Canada and the links that connect the arts with the public;
- Identified the **broad environmental conditions** (artistic, social, economic, political, and technological) that most profoundly affect the arts in Canada; and
- Set out a **comprehensive framework and five strategic directions with specific actions and goals**, as the focus for its efforts to achieve its ultimate goal.

The Council established priorities, with assigned budgets, and monitored and evaluated its progress according to this framework and the strategic directions. In its annual reports to Parliament, the Council reports on its performance, demonstrating what it has achieved and what it still needs to do to reach its goals.

During the 2008–11 period, the Council’s financial resources were growing. Beginning in 2008–09, the federal government provided the Council with \$30 million in new recurring funding. This helped the Council increase the number of artists receiving individual grants and the grants available to many arts organizations, and allowed it to act on other strategic priorities.

In 2010, building on the experience of those years, the Council began a second strategic planning exercise. Once again, it carried out extensive consultations (the largest in its history) both internally and externally. Respondents were asked:

- Is the Council on the right track?
- Are there changes in the broader environment that warrant a shift in emphasis or direction?
- How can the Council best support the arts in Canada over the next five years?

A large majority of arts respondents and other stakeholders told the Council that the organization was on the right track with its five strategic directions and should continue to prioritize them – but now taking greater account of the major trends affecting the arts and society. As key trends, respondents identified **the economic downturn, public engagement in the arts, opportunities for synergies in the arts, and new technologies**.

# Strategic and Corporate Plans: 2011 – 16

The 2011-16 plans reaffirm the five directions that will continue to guide the Council's activities and identify specific strategies, as well as provide a means of monitoring their progress. The five directions are:

## Directions

1. Individual Artists
2. Arts Organizations
3. Equity
4. Partnership
5. Organizational Development

1. **Individual Artists:** Reinforce the Council's commitment to individual artists, working alone or collaboratively, as the core of artistic practice in Canada.
2. **Arts Organizations:** Broaden the Council's commitment to arts organizations to strengthen their capacity to underpin artistic practices in all parts of the country.
3. **Equity:** Enhance the Council's leadership role in promoting equity as a critical priority in fulfilling Canada's artistic aspirations.
4. **Partnership:** Make partnerships with other organizations a key element in the Council's approach to advancing its mandate.

5. **Organizational Development:** Enhance the Council's capacity to support the arts and implement change by strengthening its structure, staffing and services.

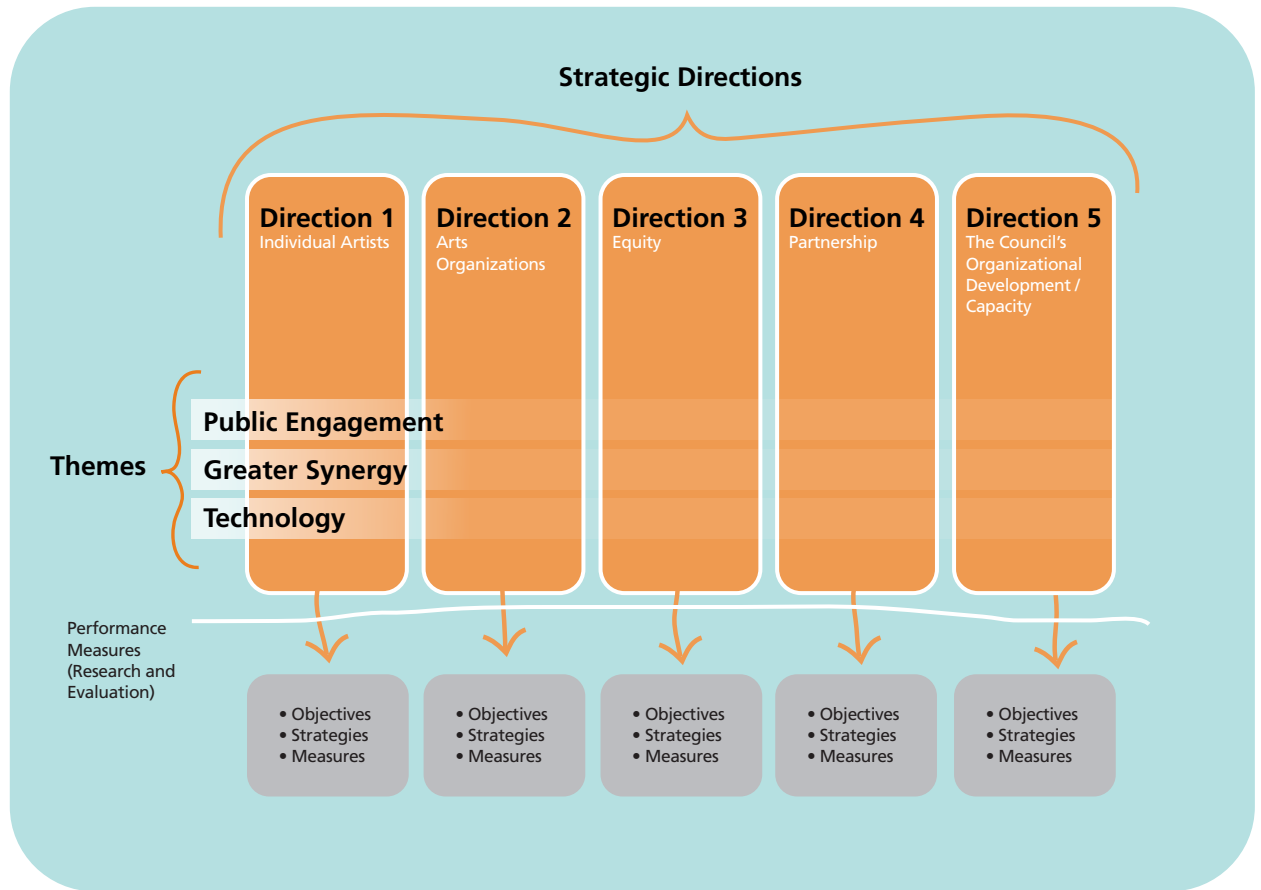
While the five directions provide essential continuity over the eight years encompassed by the 2008-11 and the 2011-16 plans, there are some marked differences. The 2011-16 plans address a very different economic climate and reflect the three major environmental trends that have been identified in the consultations and that have increasingly significant effects on the arts and the Canadian people:

- The growing importance of **public engagement in the arts**,
- The vital role played by **synergy** in the sector and society in general, and
- **New technologies** that are having a profound impact on how the arts are created and experienced.

Along with the **economic reality**, these cross-cutting environmental trends will permeate all five strategic directions and influence both the Council's relationships to the arts community and other stakeholders and its internal operations and activities.



## Strategic Directions and Themes



## The Economic Downturn

The global recession of the last few years has affected all sectors, including the arts. The Conference Board of Canada estimates that revenues for Canada's culture sector declined in 2009 by about \$3.1 billion, or 4.3%. While recovery is under way, governments at the federal, provincial and municipal levels are sending clear signals that several lean years lie ahead.

This situation has a double effect on the Council. First, the Council's own revenues from government are unlikely to grow and may even be adjusted. Second, because the Council is a national arts funder, it is affected by decisions made by all levels of government. Cuts in arts funding elsewhere almost always lead to increased demand on the Council.

Recognizing the new fiscal reality, the Council will continue to invest its resources strategically and responsibly. It will make use of

its national role and connections to explore how it can extend the impact of its resources and leverage new partnerships for the arts. It will also continue to present a well-documented case for additional public investment in the arts, working with other public funders, national arts service organizations and the arts community.

## Public Engagement in the Arts

While public engagement is not new for the arts or for the Council, there is a growing enthusiasm for it among artists and arts organizations, in government circles and the research community. The exploration of public engagement involves looking at culture from the experiences of individuals and communities, as well as that of the artist-creator.

Artists and arts organizations are at the forefront in engaging the public, seeking new ways to build relationships with audiences and the communities in which they work and to improve the quality of life of the people of Canada. The research community demonstrates specific benefits (intellectual, emotional, spiritual, social, etc.) that flow from experiences with the arts. In determining whether they should invest in the arts, politicians and governments are also interested in evidence of strong public interest and appreciation.

Public engagement has particular resonance for the Council because the organization's purpose is to support artistic practice for the benefit of the Canadian people.

In 2011-16, while staying true to its focus on professional arts practice, the Council will support the arts sector in its outreach to the public, providing increased opportunities for artists and arts organizations to engage the public and forge new connections within their communities and with other sectors. It will also highlight the contribution that art and artists make to everyday life and increase the vis-

ibility and profile of artists receiving its prizes and awards.

## Synergy

Synergy is a concept particularly well-suited to the Canada Council. Over many years, the Council has developed a highly consultative culture and very close links with artists and arts organizations across the country, funders at all levels of government, and other stakeholders. Examples include the Council's work in organizing the Canadian Public Arts Funders (CPAF) network, its active role in tri-level government meetings, its regular meetings with national arts service organizations, and its extensive use of artists and other arts professionals from across the country in contributing to program development and assessing grant applications.

Synergy was strongly recommended in the consultations. Respondents recognize that cooperation within the arts community and between the arts community and other partners increase the impact and return on investment of the resources available, and can be enormously beneficial to the arts and Canadian society.

Between 2011-16, the Council will develop an increased number of opportunities for synergy to strengthen arts practice and the links between the arts and Canadians. It will progressively modify its program objectives to encourage resource- and knowledge-sharing and it will explore ways to strengthen corporate funding of the arts.

## New Technologies

The transition to a digital society is literally transforming life in all sectors, including the arts sector. From the creator to the consumer, everyone is responding to the radical changes driven by new technologies, including social media. These technologies provide new ways for individuals to connect and to access cultural content. Increasingly artists and arts organizations are innovators in using new technologies to create, produce, promote and disseminate art – often without the participation of traditional intermediaries.

During 2011-16, the Council will support the arts sector in its efforts to exploit opportunities offered by new technologies in the creation, production and dissemination of the arts. It will also use new technologies to improve efficiencies by streamlining application and assessment processes, and upgrade its technology to better serve its mandate.

## Advancing the Five Directions

Over the next five years, the Council will focus on advancing its five strategic directions, to achieve the objectives below:

### **Direction 1 – Individual Artists**

- Encourage and support artistic creativity for the benefit of all Canadians;
- Lead a national dialogue to recognize the critical role of Canada's artists within society; and
- Support the work of artists as they reflect, challenge and share the aspirations of Canadians.

### **Direction 2 – Arts Organizations**

- Encourage and support the rich diversity of Canada's arts organizations for the benefit of all Canadians;
- Lead a national dialogue to recognize the critical role of arts organizations within communities; and
- Strengthen the leadership role of arts organizations in working collaboratively to build dynamic arts environments that enrich community life.

### **Direction 3 – Equity**

- Promote and advance equity and diversity as an integral element of the Canadian arts ecology;
- Ensure that groups that experience significant barriers to accessing public arts support achieve equitable access to the Council's programs and services; and
- Support and promote vital leadership among equity groups.

### **Direction 4 – Partnerships**

- Maximize the impact of the Council's resources and leverage new funds through working with partners in and outside the arts; and
- Collaborate with arts funders to improve programs and services to the Canadian professional arts community.

### **Direction 5 – Organizational Development**

- Share the knowledge the Council has attained through its national role, for the benefit of the arts community and the public;
- Expand the Council's reach through enhanced communications and services that promote the impact of the work of artists and arts organizations in enriching the lives of all Canadians.
- Maintain the Council's capacity to serve the arts community and provide value to Canadians through a time of restraint.

## The Critical Challenge of Measuring Outcomes

In Canada and across the world, public arts funders face a common challenge – on what bases should they evaluate their success? Like the Canada Council, many funders have established processes for strategic planning and identified goals and strategies for reaching those goals, while recognizing that measuring outcomes in a world as inherently experiential and qualitative as the arts remains difficult.

In recent years, the Council has made great strides in clarifying how and when to evaluate its own actions, and its corporate plan specifies a number of indicators, both quantitative and qualitative, which it will use to measure its progress. Through different tools, such as its annual reports, the Council has also established a regular public reporting and accounting process.

Over the next five years, taking the planned indicators as a starting point, the Council will seek to improve the measures by which it assesses its actions. In this undertaking, it will research leading national and international practice and consult with the arts community, members of the Canadian Public Arts Funders network and of the International Federation of Arts Councils and Cultural Agencies, foundations and other stakeholders.

COVER

Detail of *Hylozoic Ground* at the Canada Pavilion of the 2010 Venice Biennale. Developed by PBAI (Philip Beesley Architect Inc.), in collaboration with the University of Waterloo School of Architecture; designed by Philip Beesley with collaborators Rob Gorbet (engineering director) and Rachel Armstrong (experimental chemistry advisor).

The Canada Pavilion of the Venice Biennale is supported by the Canada Council for the Arts and the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada.

PHOTO: © PBAI / Photo by Pierre Charron

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## Conclusion

For the Canada Council, the major issue for 2011-16 is how, in a time of limited resources, increasing demand and a rapidly changing environment, it can maintain and ideally improve its support to the arts and its engagement towards the Canadian people.

Though the Council does not have new money to devote to the changing conditions outlined previously, it has tremendous non-monetary resources that it deploys for the benefit of the arts and Canadians. These include its highly developed consultative culture; its deep and broad knowledge of the arts in Canada; its perspective as a national funder; its close connections to individual artists and arts organizations; and its capacity to organize, participate in, inspire, be a catalyst for, and lead national conversations and initiatives.

Using all its resources, the Council will seek to maximize the impact of its interventions and extend their effectiveness. It will encourage and promote greater synergies within the arts sector and between the sector and other stakeholders, including knowledge- and resource-sharing, collaboration and partnerships. It will strengthen the links between the arts and Canadians, providing increased opportunities for artists and arts organizations to engage the public and forge new connections within their communities and with other sectors. It will expand opportunities for the use of the new technologies in the creation, production and dissemination of the arts.

In all its actions, the Council will concentrate on ensuring that its investments provide maximum benefits for Canada's artists and citizens. It will continue to strengthen its programs and services, the effectiveness of its interventions, and its capacity to monitor and improve outcomes – helping to build a vital and diverse arts sector that enriches the lives of all Canadians.