

PAARC

Pacific Association of Artist Run Centres

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Brief to the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

Presented on behalf PAARC by
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October 14, 2014
Surrey, 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
Gropp's Gallery
grunt gallery
LIVE Biennale
Livedspace
Malaspina Printmakers Society
MediaNet
Ministry of Casual Living

Mixed Use
New Forms Festival
ON MAIN
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
W2 Community Media Arts
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 32 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 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 provide essential services to the members of its 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!

BC artist-run centres are thriving but underfunded

The BC artist-run community is one of the most active and most recognized in Canada. The Canada Council for the Arts has recently recognized the quality of activities of BC artist-run centres. In the last year, the Canada Council for the Arts restructured its Support to artist-Run Centres Program, with the impact that many centres across the country saw their funding cut and allocated to other centres. BC is the only province that did not see its artist-run centres get funding cuts from the Canada Council; all of the centres that receive operating funds from the Council saw their funding maintained or increased. In addition, only one new centre across the country was allocated operating funds from the Council: the Vancouver-based artist-run centre 221A.

In recent years, BC artist-run centres have been increasing their activities and reach. Data pulled from the CADAC (Canadian Arts Data/Données sur les arts au Canada), a national

database used by arts organizations and funding bodies, demonstrates that, in the last six years, BC artist-run centres¹ have increased:

- The number of artists they work with by 8%
- The number of public activities they organize by 18.5%
- Attendance at public activities they organize by 53%

As demonstrated above, artist-run centres in BC are thriving but need increased support from the provincial government to continue developing innovative programs, supporting artists, and engaging communities.

Artist-run centres in BC are underfunded in comparison to their Canadian counter-parts:

- In the last 6 years, median provincial funding attributed to BC artist-run centres was on average \$21,205 under the Canadian median.²
- Less than half of the organizations in PAARC's membership received operating funding from the BC Arts Council in 2013-14.

The arts are aligned with BC Government priorities

PAARC believes that increased funding to 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.³ 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.⁴

Increased funding to the BC Arts Council's core budget and to Gaming Community Grants to organizations is the only way to ensure the health and continued growth of the cultural sector. The lack of adequate provincial funding to the cultural sector creates a climate of precarity, which puts additional strain on the daily operations of non-profit arts organizations like artist-run centres. The organizations we represent operate with less paid staff than required, and often have to shut down or reduce their program of activities due to lack of financial, human, and material resources. Emerging artists and organizations particularly struggle to sustain their activities, and the lack of access to adequate support takes the wind out of the sails of those who are actively shaping the future of British Columbia's cultural sector.

Sustaining cultural production in BC

In the past year, the BC Government has demonstrated its commitment to making art and culture accessible to the next generation of British Columbians, and to ensuring quality higher education arts training. The development of youth-oriented and early career development programs offered through the BC Arts Council combined with significant

investments in the new Emily Carr University Campus testify to this. We salute these initiatives as they directly support the development of emerging arts practitioners in the province. However, we denounce the fact that these initiatives, which are aligned with the BC Creative Futures strategy, do not primarily aim to foster the development of the next generation of British Columbian artists and cultural producers. As outlined in the *Ministry of Community, Sport and Cultural Development 2014/15 – 2016/17 Service Plan*, these measures aim to develop “the next generation of skilled workers who will be creative, collaborative and innovative thinkers”⁵ in accordance to the *BC Jobs Plan*.

Effectively, *The Ministry of Community, Sport and Cultural Development 2014/15 – 2016/17 Service Plan* draws direct connection between the Creative BC strategy and the success of the *BC Jobs Plan*. Yet, the *BC Jobs Plan* does not identify the cultural sector and the creative industries as key industry sectors.⁶ In this context, we fear that the value of quality artistic education and its potential impact on the development of the cultural sector are sidelined by the current government’s strategy to capitalize on artistic skills and creative intelligence to fuel the growth of non-creative industry sectors. Without concrete support provided for the development of professional opportunities in the cultural sector, it is difficult to conceive that newly created youth-oriented programs “were produced to help prepare youth for rewarding careers in the creative industries.”⁷

We fear that, if no incentive measures are set in place to retain the next generation of trained artists and cultural workers in the province (i.e. increased opportunities for artists to produce and showcase their work in the province, and increased employment opportunities in cultural organizations), British Columbia will lose its young artistic labour force and, with it, potential to benefit from a growing creative economy. We urge the government to start planning ahead increased subsidies to the cultural sector in response to the expansion of trained artistic and cultural workforce that measures of the BC Creative Futures initiative will foster.

We urge you to set in place measures that will incite artists to continue producing and presenting work in BC. Artists are essential to the vitality of the province’s cultural sector but suffer from economic precarity:

- The average earnings of working artists are 37% below the Canadian labour force average.⁸
- 48% of artists in Vancouver have higher education degrees, yet their median yearly earnings are evaluated at \$12,900.⁹

We urge the government to invest in arts and culture, and bring the province’s per capita public funding to the arts, at a minimum, to the national average and to follow recommendations made last year by the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services to: “Provide additional funding to the BC Arts Council and for organizations eligible for Community Gaming Grants when finances permit.”¹⁰ With a forecasted surplus of \$184 million for 2014-15, we believe that increasing subsidies to non-profit arts organizations and individual artists is well within reach.

Recommendations for the 2015 BC Budget

The following recommendations are aligned with those of the Professional Arts Alliance of the Greater Victoria and of the BC members of the Pacific IMAA.

- 1) Increase the budget of BC Arts Council to \$32 million, with a plan to increase the Council's legislated appropriated investment to \$40 million, over the following two-year period.
- 2) We propose increasing Gaming Community Grants to organizations from \$134 million in 2011-12 to \$156 million for 2015-16, with a goal of increasing Gaming grants steadily in the long term.
- 3) To provide stable, predictable funding for the arts sector, we are recommending that government:
 - Implement a multi-year funding model similar to the Canada Council for the Arts for the BC Arts Council
 - Re-instate the multi-year funding pilot introduced for the Community Gaming Grant program as a permanent option for organizations.
- 4) The government should develop a capital program to help arts organizations purchase and maintain presentation venues for art and culture.

¹ Data only pertains to artist-run centres registered in the CADAC database but is representative of the sector as a whole.

² According to aggregate CADAC data for Canadian artist-run centres between the 2008-2009 and 2013-2014 fiscal years.

³ *Mapping Artists and Cultural Workers in Canada's Large Cities*, Hill Strategies, February 2010. Table 1, p. 7.

⁴ *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.

⁵ *Ministry of Community, Sport and Cultural Development 2014/15 – 2016/17 Service Plan*. 9.

⁶ Identified sectors include: agrifoods, forestry, international education, mining, natural gas, technology, tourism, and transportation. Source: "Industry Sectors." *BC Jobs Plan*. <<http://www.bcjobsplan.ca/industry-sectors/>>

⁷ "Message from the Minister and Accountability Statement." *Ministry of Community, Sport and Cultural Development 2014/15 – 2016/17 Service Plan*. 18.

⁸ *New report reveals 10 key facts about the working lives of artists in Canada*, Hills Strategies, February 4, 2008.

⁹ *Mapping Artists and Cultural Workers in Canada's Large Cities*, Hill Strategies, February 2010. Table 1, p. 7.

¹⁰ Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services *Report on the Budget 2014 Consultations*. November 2013. 38.