

moving forward

Strategic Plan 2008-11
Values and Directions



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada

The Strategic Plan sets out the values and directions that will guide the Canada Council for the Arts over the next three to five years and that will form the basis of its Corporate Plan for 2008-11. It is the result of what the Council believes to be the largest and most extensive consultation in its history. (For the Strategic Plan and information about the consultations, see www.canadacouncil.ca)

In early 2008, the Council will publish a companion document – an Action Plan – describing the specific operational objectives and strategies it will pursue to achieve these directions, together with budget allocations, including the \$30 million in new, recurring funding announced by the Federal Government in July 2007.



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Design: Alejandro Contreras
Printed in Canada



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The quotations that appear throughout this publication are taken from the Canada Council's consultations with national arts service organizations, arts funders at the provincial, territorial and municipal levels, and other organizations and individuals with an interest in the Council's work.

October 2007

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The Canada Council for the Arts exists to ensure that Canadian artists and citizens have a distinctive voice on the national and international stage.

This voice is not singular. It expresses itself through a variety of traditions, practices and media, speaks in both official languages, and is grounded in the startling diversity of places that make up the second largest country in the world. It tells stories as old as the First Peoples and as fresh as laughter, as elemental as a human heartbeat and as complex as the human spirit. To many, it is this voice that communicates what it means to be Canadian.

taking stock



“ [We] urge the Canada Council to build on its already enviable reputation and be seen as the driving force behind a Canadian arts sector that is renowned worldwide. ”

human creativity has become an essential economic driver

The Canada Council was created in 1957, on the recommendation of a Royal Commission, to foster and promote the study and enjoyment of the arts and the production of works in the arts. Thanks to this forward-looking decision – and subsequent investments in the arts by jurisdictions across Canada – Canadians now enjoy an extraordinary abundance of art of exceptional quality, deep, rich and diverse, across the land.

Some things from the Canada Council's earliest days remain constant – for example, the commitment to keep artistic decision-making at arm's length from government, to protect freedom of expression. Equally constant is the pride that Canadians take in their own artistic achievements.

But a great number of changes have taken place over this half-century.

Some of these changes are demographic. Although Canada has always been a land of immigration, never before have people from so many diverse cultural backgrounds called Canada home. Canada's population and economic vitality continue to move from east to west, and from farms to cities. Though the population is growing older, new generations appear on the scene with new values and aspirations.

Some of these changes are attitudinal. Definitions of what constitutes art are much broader than in the past, and less constrained by European experience. The contribution of Aboriginal people – the first artists of Canada – is increasingly recognized. Canadians live among a rich multiplicity of cultural traditions and influences, and a growing environmental consciousness is permeating society. Human creativity, based on ideas and knowledge, rather than natural resources or manufactured goods, has become an essential economic driver, and governments at all levels are increasingly conscious of the need to advance the creative agenda.

Some of these changes are technological. Digitally-based communications technologies mean that people everywhere are connected in networks. While theoretically this offers access to an infinite variety of cultural experiences, in practice globalized industrial forces promote the increasing dominance of commercial entertainment, largely of foreign origin. Purchases of personal entertainment systems like high-definition television screens and digital cameras now exceed what Canadians spend on live artistic events.

**a voice that is alive,
resonant and reflective
of a changing world**

Some changes are in arts practices themselves. Many artists produce multi-disciplinary works that employ several media simultaneously or cross cultural and sectoral boundaries in new ways. Many artists use new media and digital technology to explore new forms of artistic expression, and even artists who are more traditional in their choice of discipline often use new technologies to disseminate their work. Some artists reject the notion of a distinct artistic product and work entirely in the realm of process and ideas. Some artists are exploring new ways of engaging audiences, working collaboratively with communities, and integrating environmental and social issues in their art.

And some changes are in government and the public funding environment. In 1957, the Canada Council was the largest public funder of the arts in Canada and one of only a few. Today, it is one of many, and its budget is a small fraction of the total invested in the arts annually. Arts councils or arts funding programs now exist in all provinces and territories and many municipalities, and their combined budgets easily exceed that of the Canada Council. At the federal level, the Council estimates that of every dollar invested by the Government of Canada in culture, the Canada Council invests only four cents.

In its second half-century, the Canada Council's challenge is to ensure that the distinctive voice of Canadians continues to be heard and valued – alive, resonant and reflective of this new and ever-changing world.



laying the groundwork



“The Canada Council has been vital in supporting artists and responding to needs in the community.”

In early 2007, its 50th anniversary year, the Canada Council launched a strategic planning exercise with what it believes to be the largest stakeholder consultation in its history. It posted a discussion paper on its web site and sent invitations to participate to approximately 20,000 artists, arts organizations and other Canadians interested in the arts. It consulted extensively with its staff and board, and it organized meetings with national arts service organizations, funding counterparts at the provincial, territorial and municipal levels, artists and arts administrators between the ages of 18 and 30, federal colleagues, and a number of other targeted groups with an interest in the Council's work.

The purpose of these consultations was to provide the Council with a better reading of how its primary stakeholders view the Council, to assess the degree to which they support its underlying values and priorities, and to invite suggestions on how it might strengthen its performance going forward. By the end of June 2007, the Council had received more than 1,700 responses, and stakeholder feedback was overwhelmingly positive. The Council's fundamental values were strongly endorsed, and its role as Canada's national arts council was deemed essential. Full documentation on the consultation process and its outcomes is available on the Council's web site.

In a separate but parallel process, the Council also undertook a formal organizational design review in 2007. Led by the consulting firm Deloitte, this review examined how well the structure of the Canada Council supports the fulfillment of its mandate and

made a series of recommendations that targeted, among other things, enhancing the Council's capacity for strategic planning and its ability to implement priorities across the organization.

In addition, the first half of 2007 provided the Council with significant insight into the capacity and aspirations of Canada's arts sector and the impact of the arts on Canadian communities, through the Council's investment of a one-time \$50 million increase to its budget announced in May 2006. The Council divided one-third of the new money evenly between grants to individual artists and projects that provided greater public access to the arts, and awarded the remaining two-thirds through a competitive peer-assessed process to strengthen the artistic, administrative and audience development activities of 561 organizations receiving Council operating support.

Together, the strategic planning consultations, the organizational design review, and the results of the investment of new funding helped the Council come to a number of conclusions that underpin its thinking for the future.

values + achievements



“The Council reflects the diversity of Canada through the arts.”

The conclusions the Council reached during its extensive consultations reinforce its fundamental values and achievements, and they provide a bridge to the Council's directions for the years ahead.

- The Canada Council's respect for artistic merit – or excellence – as its most important consideration in awarding grants ensures that its funds are invested in work of high quality from all parts of Canada and all disciplines and practices, including art that is challenging and risk-taking.
- The Canada Council plays a unique role at the federal level in putting individual artists at the centre of its thinking and investing directly in them – a critical element in the Council's contribution to advancing Canada's creative economy and Canada's international reputation for innovation.
- The Council's historic commitment to diversity and equity and to inclusive policies reflecting Canada's rich and complex cultural reality – languages, cultures, racial groups, genders, generations, arts practices and regions – is one of its greatest achievements, and it must be reinforced, expanded (for example, in support of disability arts) and strengthened (to ensure that the Council can respond to evolving arts practices).
- The Canada Council's use of peers in the assessment of grant applications and in developing programs and policies strengthens the quality of its decision-making, its investment in professional arts practitioners, and its relevance and responsiveness.
- The knowledge base of the Canada Council – the expertise and commitment of its staff, its research, and ability to speak for the arts nationally – and the mutual respect between the Council and the arts community are potentially as valuable as its budget, and should be viewed as critical resources to be strategically developed and invested.
- Over the years, as times have changed, the Council has been adaptable and flexible, while remaining a lean and efficient organization.
- The Council values transparency and accountability in its operations, with publicly accessible guidelines and objectives for all of its programs.
- The Canada Council is in a unique position to advance the careers of professional artists and arts organizations in an international, as well as national, context.
- Despite the expanding universe in which the Canada Council finds itself, it must keep its priorities and interventions targeted and strategic if it wishes to maximize its impact.

sustaining the arts infrastructure



“The Council has done an excellent job of establishing a network of organizations and infrastructure across Canada.... This [has been] vital in creating a dynamic and diverse arts landscape.”

a strong and healthy
arts ecosystem

One of the most important conclusions the Council has reached relates to the perennial question of what is needed for a strong and healthy arts ecosystem – in a given region, or community, or discipline, or arts practice. We have begun describing this success factor as the quality of the arts “infrastructure,” using that word in its original meaning as the underlying foundation or basic framework for an organization or system.

For sustainable professional arts practices, a community (however defined) needs excellent individual artists, excellent arts organizations that support, employ, present, exhibit, publish or provide other resources for artists, engaged audiences, a supportive public, an enlightened funding and public policy environment, and facilities for the practice of art. Together, these positive forces provide the basis for a sustainable arts sector, which in turn creates the foundation for the community’s cultural life and shared values.

Stable and resilient arts organizations are a critical component of this infrastructure. In Canada, these organizations come in all sizes, scales and disciplines, reflecting the rich diversity of arts practices across the country. They are not restricted to urban areas, and they need not be present in a given community in large numbers. It is

the quality, strength and connectedness of the infrastructure – rather than its size or quantity – that determines how well it serves the arts and the public.

The Council believes that there is a direct relationship between the existence and strength of an arts infrastructure in a community and the capacity of that community to support artistic practice and to access funding from the Canada Council.

directions for the future



“ The Council has always been a visionary organization.... [We] should never lose sight of the invaluable role it plays in Canadian society. ”

For 50 years, the Canada Council has been a leader in its field, breaking new ground and working with artists, arts funders and other stakeholders to advance a diverse range of arts practices for the benefit of all Canadians. Its status as a Crown corporation at arm's length from government has allowed it to change with the times without compromising artistic freedom. As the third oldest national arts council in the world (after Great Britain and Ireland), the Canada Council has played an historic role not only in Canada but internationally. It is incumbent on the Council to build on the learnings of its first half-century, and set a clear, strategic course for the future.

Over the next three to five years, the Canada Council will commit itself to the following five interrelated directions. The first three directions are organizing principles for the Council's support of the arts. The last two are means of maximizing the impact of that support and its contribution to Canadian life.

➤ 1.0 **reinforce the Council's commitment to individual artists, working alone or collaboratively, as the core of artistic practice in Canada**

The Canada Council will explore ways to align its support of individual artists more closely to their creative and career needs, in both Canada and abroad. As resources permit, it will increase the maximum grant levels and flexibility of support available to individual artists, and aim eventually to parallel more closely the levels of support available to research professionals in the academic world. It will increase its outreach to younger artists applying to the Canada Council in the early stages of their professional careers. It will also enhance its celebration of recipients of Canada Council-administered prizes to make a larger public aware of the accomplishments of Canadian artists.

➤ 2.0

broaden the Council's commitment to arts organizations to strengthen their capacity to underpin artistic practices in all parts of the country

The Council will expand its support to arts organizations – small, medium-sized and large – to reflect its awareness that these bodies are not only supporters and employers of artists and producers of artistic work but also primary vehicles for audience development (including arts education) and dissemination in the country. It will work towards a significant increase in public investment in the organizational infrastructure across the country and reinforce the role of Canadian arts organizations abroad. Where the Council feels that the arts infrastructure or conditions required to sustain professional arts activity are particularly thin or fragile, it will consider special measures and tools to strengthen that infrastructure. It will work with the most highly-resourced organizations to ensure that their focus extends beyond their own survival to encompass the interests of the disciplines and communities in which they operate.

➤ 3.0

enhance the Council's leadership role in promoting equity as a critical priority in fulfilling Canada's artistic aspirations

The Council will continue to use its unique national perspective to identify and address inequities of all kinds – linguistic, regional, cultural, Aboriginal, racial, gender-based, etc. It will establish measurable goals to align its funding and its operations to reflect more accurately the demographic and cultural make-up of the country, and it will actively intervene in circumstances which it believes require special action. It will highlight diversity as a conscious part of all communications strategies and, as resources permit, will consider adding new dimensions, such as disability arts.

➤ 4.0

make partnerships with other organizations a key element in the Council's approach to advancing its mandate

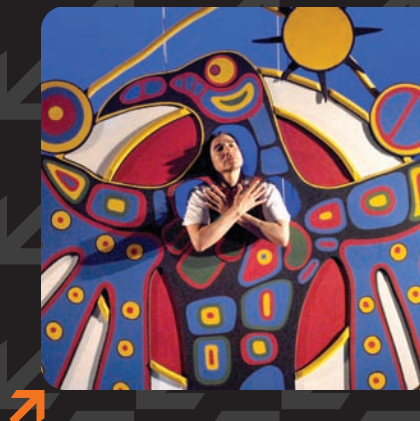
Wherever possible, the Council will use partnerships with other organizations, including other funders, as an effective and economical alternative to expanding its own staff and programs. It will reinforce its excellent partnership with the provincial and territorial arts funders, and it will work with its federal colleagues to improve the delivery of programs for the arts. Partnerships will be helpful in areas where the Council has a deep interest but neither the mandate nor the resources to deliver direct programs, and they may offer new opportunities for the arts and the public's experience of the arts. The Council will also use partnerships in an effort to reach out across the country, and it will maintain links with its counterparts around the world to ensure it has access to new ideas and best practices internationally. Partnerships will help ensure that the Council's impact exceeds its resources; they will also broaden the Council's horizons, its ability to view others as natural partners in advancing the shared mission of providing opportunities for Canadians to express themselves creatively and for people to experience their art.

➤ 5.0

implement structural changes within the Canada Council to improve communication and strengthen the organization's capacity to implement change

To make greater use of the Council's knowledge base and strengthen its capacities as an organization, the Council will implement a number of recommendations made in the 2007 organizational design review to improve its culture of learning and information exchange, research, strategic planning, program evaluation, change implementation, and communications capacity. The overall goal will be to strengthen leadership and horizontal integration throughout the organization, including making the Canadian Commission for UNESCO and the Art Bank more integral to the Council and working more closely with the Public Lending Right Commission. These changes will also enhance the Council's capacity to implement its priorities throughout all aspects of the organization.

next steps



“The Council has been vital to the development of Canadian art not only on the national scene but also the international stage.”

a vigorous creative
life that stimulates
the imagination

When the Council asked for advice to help it develop this strategic plan, it had no idea that the arts community and the public would respond with such an extraordinary outpouring of interest. We are grateful both for this heartfelt vote of confidence and for the belief that, as Canada's national arts council, we can do even better in the future. The experience has helped to remind us of the powerful impact the arts make in Canadian life and how essential it is to enable Canadian artists to express their visions and realities and share them with their fellow Canadians coast-to-coast.

In July of this year, the Minister of Canadian Heritage announced that the Council will receive an additional \$30 million in its base funding beginning in 2008-09, thus increasing the Council's capacity to carry out its objectives. The Council believes that by acting on the directions above over the next three to five years, it will significantly improve its ability to support arts practices in Canada and provide greater opportunities for Canadians to experience the arts. To do so, it must translate these directions into distinct operational objectives and strategies, with appropriate resources and clearly defined outcomes. This will be the Council's task as it prepares its action plan and its corporate plan for the years 2008-11.

The Canada Council's over-arching goal, however, remains constant: that Canada have a rich and vigorous creative life that stimulates the imagination and gives Canadians the means to share their spirit and vision with one another and the world.

photos



Dancers Leigh Allardyce and Kelley McKinlay in the Alberta Ballet production of *Dancing Joni*, a contemporary work inspired by the music of Canadian singer Joni Mitchell, choreographed by Alberta Ballet artistic director Jean Grand-Maitre. Photo: Trudie Lee



Allyson McHardy and Krisztina Szabó as Rheinmaidens, and Richard Paul Fink as Alberich in the Canadian Opera Company's production of *Das Rheingold*. Photo: Sam Javanrouh



Playwright-actor Robert Lepage, in Ex Machina's production of *The Andersen Project*, based on the work of Hans Christian Andersen. Photo: ©Érick Labbé



Soprano Measha Brueggergosman. Photo: ©Paul Elledge / DG



Pakak Inukshuk as the Shaman, in Cannes Festival winner Zacharias Kunuk's film *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*. Photo: Oana Spinu, courtesy Igloolik Isuma Productions



Artist David Altmejd with *The Giant 2*, created for the Canadian exhibit at the 2007 Venice Biennale. Photo: Ellen Page Wilson, courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, and Stuart Shave / Modern Art, London © David Altmejd



Billy Merasty in *Copper Thunderbird*, a play celebrating the life of Aboriginal painter Norval Morrisseau by prize-winning playwright Marie Clements. Photo: Andrée Lanthier



Images from *Taken 04*, by media artist David Rokeby, winner of a Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts. Photo: courtesy Pari Nadimi Gallery



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