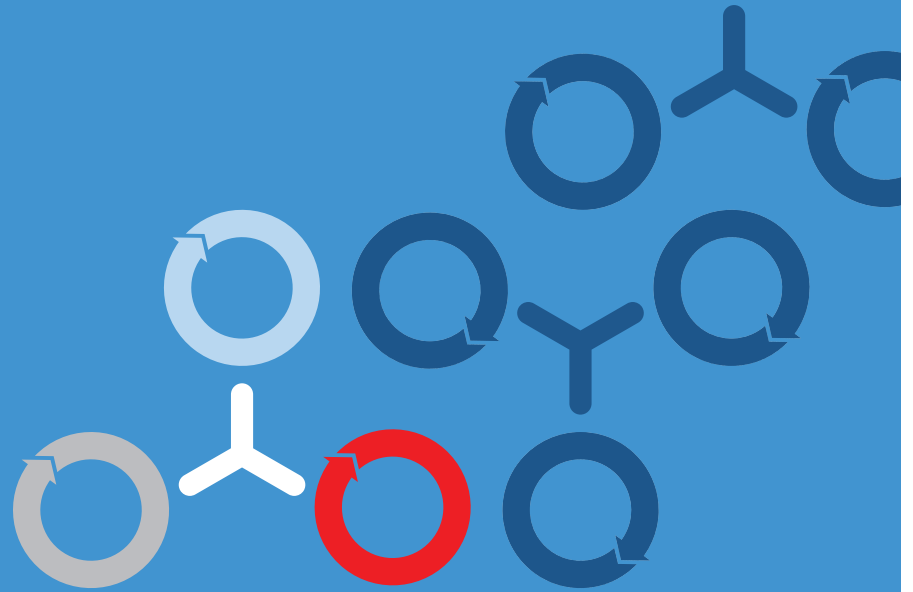




Canada Council  
for the Arts

Conseil des arts  
du Canada



Dialogues:

# Public Engagement in the Arts

Report

Bringing the arts to life  
De l'art plein la vie

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Canada Council  
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## Dialogues: Public Engagement in the Arts

In 2012, the Canada Council for the Arts entered into an open conversation with the arts and other sectors in response to shifts and trends in how the public engages with the arts<sup>1</sup>. It released a [discussion paper](#) that examined many of these trends, notably demographic changes, the impact of technology, shifts in consumer and participation patterns and changes in the models of presenting, producing and disseminating art.

Amid these trends, there is a broad debate taking place about how to deepen the public's experience of the arts. Artists, arts organizations, funders inside and outside government, as well as other sectors such as health, justice and education are working to better understand the impact of the arts on citizens and on society. No single organization or perspective owns this conversation. Interesting developments, studies and ideas are coming from all over the arts sector and beyond.

The Canada Council, like other arts funders and public policy agencies, is affected by all of these changes. The Canada Council is working to understand how to best fulfill its role as a national arts agency in a rapidly changing environment. Its role is to help the professional arts sector thrive in order to contribute to the benefits that Canadians experience through the arts.

This is part of a broader transformation at the Canada Council that includes reviewing its largest investment, operating grants; providing new forms of support to organizations to enable them to respond to change; increased focus on national and international market access; working more in partnership, and a renewed emphasis on the principle of equity in programs and policies. These are all distinct yet inter-related processes.

These transformations have not been without controversy. Some have expressed concern that public engagement signaled a retreat from the Council's longstanding commitment to artistic merit, professional practice and risk-taking. The Canada Council remains dedicated to the importance of artistic excellence and innovation. The focus on public engagement does not diminish the Council's appetite for artistic risk, but it does revitalize the Council's mandate, which has always been multifaceted: to foster and promote the study and enjoyment of, and the production of works in, the arts.

The discussion on public engagement has nevertheless been generally positive. Major events, forums, reports and actions have shown that the Council is not alone in its preoccupations. In many ways, the Council is simply mirroring trends in the broader community.

The Canadian arts sector is making important strides in understanding the impact of its work on society in a time of rapid change, and in learning how to deepen the experiences Canadians have with the arts. The Canada Council works in collaboration with the artists and arts organizations it supports and with

<sup>1</sup> The Council's working definition of public engagement in the arts is "*Actively engaging more people in the artistic life of society notably through attendance, observation, curation, active participation, co-creation, learning, cultural mediation and creative self-expression.*"

other stakeholders to address these challenges. Our common goal is a vital and diverse arts sector that enriches the lives of all Canadians.

The Canada Council plays an important role in articulating the importance of the arts to stakeholders in government, business and other sectors. It is building upon its core business of providing grants by more actively telling the story of how the arts benefit Canadians. Still, the message about the value of the arts is probably best conveyed by citizens themselves. Theirs is the strongest voice since it reflects their view of how the arts benefit their lives.

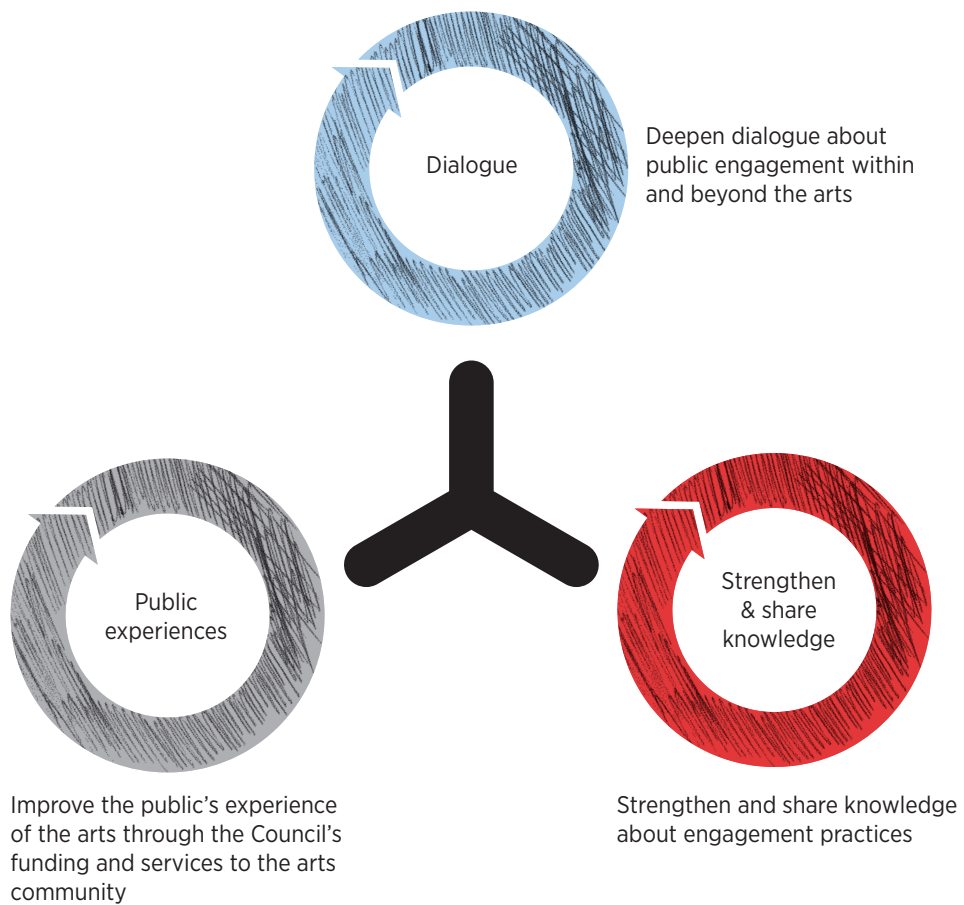
The Canada Council is excited to see new and challenging thinking feeding into this dialogue. Deepening the understanding of participation and behavioral trends and investigating the role of the arts in building a healthy society have been central to this over the past year. The terminology around public engagement continues to evolve as the sector looks for ways to articulate the differences between engagement, audience development, participation and other concepts. These terms are understood differently in French and English and in different cultural contexts, adding to the complexity.

Government agencies and arts service organizations have been active in looking at participation and attitudes towards the arts. Three recent examples are the Department of Canadian Heritage's [Arts and Heritage Access and Availability Study](#) 2012, the [The Value of Presenting Study](#) by the Canadian Arts Presenters Association (CAPACOA) and Culture Montréal's [La participation culturelle des jeunes à Montréal](#). These have shown changes in how the public connects with the arts, with a modest decline in some forms of attendance, continued growth in electronic access to the arts and a focus on personal participation. Overall, Canadians continue to believe that the arts are important to communities and quality of life but the places and ways in which they connect are shifting.

A wide array of Canadian conferences, gatherings and forums have looked at the role the arts play in vibrant communities, sustainability and individual and collective well being. These took place on a municipal, regional and national level and allowed for fertile exchanges about the meaning of public engagement in practice, sometimes bringing the arts together with other sectors of society.

Appendix A provides a more detailed look at some selected studies and conferences.

# Public Engagement in the Arts



## What we've done

The Council is working on a number of different fronts to advance the concept of public engagement.

### ***1. Deepen dialogue about public engagement within and beyond the arts***

Throughout 2013, the Council participated in forums, conferences and gatherings across the country. Board members, the CEO and other staff have been sharing ideas and listening to viewpoints from a broad spectrum of arts community members as well as other stakeholders. Through large-scale initiatives such as the National Reading Campaign and Culture Days, the Council has worked with partners from across the arts and cultural sector to build engagement and broad access to the arts. From the importance of the professional arts sector to community vitality, the role of the arts in sustainability, cultural citizenship – the creation of personal and collective identity - and the power of the arts in social change, the Council has brought the perspective of a national arts agency and has positioned the professional arts sector as a key player in these discussions.

### ***2. Strengthen and share knowledge about engagement practices***

The Canada Council is working to better understand what engagement means across the arts spectrum, what kinds of activities the artists and arts organizations it supports are realizing and exploring where the arts public of the future is going.

**Dance Mapping:** The Canada Council is leading a major research project to get a clearer picture of Canada's full dance ecosystem and its social and economic impacts. It is working with the Ontario Arts Council and in collaboration with the members of the dance community and arts funders at all levels to examine participation, dissemination and funding. The Yes I Dance survey is the first ever national study of people who dance, both professionally and recreationally. It will help populate the Canada Council's interactive web-based dance map and provide a broad and inclusive portrait of the importance of dance in Canadians lives. The Council and its partners will evaluate these studies to see if they could be replicated for other disciplines.

**Stories from the field:** The Canada Council has undertaken a series of vignettes of highly-assessed arts organizations which are involved in interesting initiatives related to public engagement. Each organization defined their own public and their own goals and received grants through a range of programs, including operating, touring, project and artist and community collaborations.

This is ongoing exploratory research to help the Council understand the language used by grant recipients and the kinds of activities that are being applied for and reported on. The sampling of organizations is so far not fully representative of all disciplines, practices and regions so more work needs to be done. Not all organizations have the same mandate or capacity and each acts in ways that are relevant to their own missions and publics. The Council is interested in learning how different types and sizes of organizations approach this work. The research will be broadened and deepened over time and shared via the web and other forums.

The vignettes show a wide variety of engagement practices from civic and community partnerships, linking current issues with programming, engaging the public in understanding challenging artistic content and connecting with communities who face barriers in accessing the arts.

Interesting findings are coming out of this exploratory work, especially a correlation between high levels of public engagement and artistic development. Organizations that are offering innovative activities for the public are often also fostering development of artists and arts administrators through activities such as residencies and training for emerging artists.

**The Arts Public of the Future:** Foresighting and scanning are techniques used in design and public policy to identify environmental signals, drivers and trends that may affect a sector or a population in the future. This information is then used to feed into possible scenarios of what the future may hold in order to plan and prepare different models to address these.

The Canada Council will undertake a foresight study to look at the significant demographic and technological changes that are altering the make-up of the Canadian public and their means of engaging with the arts. These include the rise in access of the arts via different media and Canada's increasing diversity which may have unknown impacts on how art is understood, practiced and consumed. The foresight study will help to make a link between broader trends in behavior and values and the potential impact of these on engagement in the arts. The intent is to make the findings available and usable by the arts community and to inform the Canada Council's own work, particularly leading up to the next Strategic Planning process.

### ***3. Improve the public's experience of the arts through Council's funding and services to the arts community***

The Council invested \$153.4 million in 2012-13 in the arts sector so that artists and arts organizations can research, create and produce artistic work of the highest quality, providing Canadians with meaningful experiences.

As part of the Council's major program reviews, the arts community is being consulted on a variety of issues including changing needs, new opportunities, what public engagement means to them, how they see the Council supporting these efforts and what can be strengthened. These consultations are happening in a phased approach, with each arts discipline moving ahead according to its program cycle. Two sections, Inter-Arts and Music, have completed all or part of their consultations and the conversations about public engagement illustrate a range of views and perspectives.

For the Inter-Arts community, there was considerable discussion about the balance between reaching a public and taking risks through experimental practices. Other topics included the difference between audience development and engagement and how the variations in types of practice and organization structures have an impact on working with the public. It was suggested that a national forum that shared innovative ideas on audience development and public engagement in the arts would be beneficial.

Music organizations shared examples of their public engagement activities including educational programs, community activities involving music, and presenting music in alternative venues. Larger music organizations such as orchestras and opera companies have extensive educational programs, but

many different kinds of public engagement initiatives are also being delivered in communities, providing opportunities for community members to participate in music activities. Several organizations pointed out that programming can create important links to social causes, with many indicating how their programming strengthens their links to communities. Organizations are also presenting their music in alternative venues outside the traditional concert hall. Many organizations are working to become more accessible and engaged with the population, especially with young people, by using social media tools to create an online presence and engage the public in a dialogue about music. Many expressed the view that the Canada Council could play a larger role in promoting the arts, for example, by sparking conversations about the arts through its social media presence.

In addition to the program reviews there are other initiatives underway to address the rapid pace of change in engagement and participation. For example, there's no doubt that Canadian literature is going through a time of intense upheaval, change and transformation, so the Canada Council is hosting the first ever National Forum on the Literary Arts in February 2014. This will bring together writers, publishers, storytellers, librarians, festival directors and others in the literary milieu to discuss and explore the many changes in that sector, including creation, production, dissemination and development.

## **Where we go from here**

The Canada Council aims to position public engagement in the arts as a key element in Canada's future. It is doing so by supporting the professional arts community in engaging with its current and future publics, exploring the nature of engagement practices, providing a forum for exchange and development of ideas and by using its national voice to articulate the importance of the arts to a diverse range of stakeholders. It is critical for the Canada Council to be able to demonstrate and amplify the value it provides to citizens, via the excellent work of artists and arts organizations across the country.

The Council will continue to advance the three areas of work detailed above and will ensure that a broad range of partners and voices are involved in realizing projects and activities. The Council will evaluate the impact of these activities and the results of the dialogue to inform the development of its next Strategic Plan in 2016.

As Canada moves towards 2017, the sesquicentennial anniversary of Confederation and the Canada Council's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Council believes that Canada continues to need a vital and diverse arts sector. Great art can challenge and reframe assumptions, foster deep understanding of identity and community and assist individuals in coping with change; this is, in itself, an important outcome. But it can do even more: if the arts are embedded in the daily lives of Canadians and seen as a strategic partner for other sectors, the arts could, in the words of the Council's Chair, Joseph L. Rotman "provide the creative means to accomplish positive outcomes"<sup>2</sup>, helping Canada in realizing its potential in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

<sup>2</sup> Rotman, Joseph L., "Investing in Creativity: A National Priority", Speech to the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations, November 2013



## Appendix A

### The Canadian and International Contexts

#### Selected studies, policies and research

- Department of Canadian Heritage: [Arts and Heritage Access and Availability Study](#) 2012 – This is the fifth iteration of a national survey of Canadian adults on their participation and attitudes towards the arts. The survey results show that attitudinal support of the arts remains high; participation and attendance shows modest declines. There continue to be high levels of support for government support of the arts and high personal engagement. However, the survey shows a modest decline in both attendance at certain types of art practice and in personal participation, compared to previous surveys. This demonstrates that Canada is mirroring international trends but to a much lesser degree.
- Canadian Arts Presenting Association (CAPACOA): [The Value of Presenting Study](#) – This study looks at participation rates, benefits and values of performing arts presentation. CAPACOA has been very active in disseminating the findings, helping to raise awareness of the impact of this study. Key findings include the contribution of performing arts presenters to community vitality, valued by even those who don't attend. The study has also provided new language from the arts community itself to articulate that value.
- Culture Montréal: [La participation culturelle des jeunes à Montréal](#) 2012 (French only) – This study, undertaken by the Institut national de la recherche scientifique, details shifting engagement patterns in youth in Montreal, with new activities and different expectations replacing traditional perspectives. It was a deep qualitative look at how emerging practices and beliefs are changing engagement.
- Arts Club Theatre: Building on work in the United States done by WolfBrown with theatres in the Bay Area (California), Arts Club Theatre in Vancouver is undertaking an intrinsic impact study that looks at how attendees at live theatre are affected by the work that they see. Behavioural studies such as these help to illustrate what the personal impacts of art are on each individual.
- The National Endowment for the Arts (United States) has released preliminary data from its [2012 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts](#), the sixth iteration of this national study. It showed continuing movement towards electronic means of accessing the arts and declines in attendance at traditional forms (e.g. plays, museums) as well as literary reading. Personal participation levels are strong. The NEA has instituted programs to stimulate visualization of the data and independent research to increase usage and understanding of the data.
- Arts Council England (ACE) continues to [invest](#) heavily in audience development and participation. Through [a series of seminars and a collection of papers](#), ACE, in partnership with the Royal Society for the Arts, also looked at how to reframe the case for the arts and clarify the role that the arts play within different areas of society.

- Creative Australia, the [new national cultural policy](#), “recognises the centrality of creativity and culture across the whole of society” and puts the cultural experiences of Australians at the heart of the policy to create “a sustainable environment in which all Australians can enjoy, draw inspiration from and co-create their culture.”

### **Canadian Gatherings and Conferences**

- The 2013 Canadian Arts Presenting Association (CAPACOA) [Conference](#) and the 2013 Culture Days [Congress](#) looked at the role of the arts in communities and creative placemaking as well as the value of public and community engagement. A summit of 50 arts sector leaders from Canada convened by the Edmonton and Toronto Arts Councils explored the question “[How do we speak for the arts?](#)” and attempted to frame new messaging around the value of the arts in a changing environment.
- The role of cities in fostering the arts was discussed at the Montreal [Rendezvous Culturel](#), the Kelowna Arts & Culture [Summit](#) and the Creative Cities Network [Conference](#). The impact of technology, public engagement and the importance of other sectors such as business were the topics of these gatherings.
- The Wasan Island [Gathering](#) and the Power of the Arts [National Forum](#) all examined different aspects of the arts as agents of social change, whether in understanding sustainable development, advancing social justice and building more resilient communities. Foundations are playing a major role in these discussions, which connect the arts to sustainability in other sectors.