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Chair

Ms. Julie Dabrusin

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• (1545)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC)): Welcome to this 159th meeting of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. It is my pleasure to be here today, in the absence of Ms. Julie Dabrusin, who has been detained by other business.

Without further ado, I will introduce our sole witness for today's meeting, which will last one hour. We are pleased to welcome Simon Brault, who is Director and Chief Executive Officer of the Canada Council for the Arts.

Mr. Brault, I believe you have prepared some speaking notes for us. I invite you to deliver them and welcome you once again to the committee.

Mr. Simon Brault (Director and Chief Executive Officer, Canada Council for the Arts): Thank you for having me. I am honoured to be here.

The Canada Council for the Arts has had the enormous privilege of seeing its budget sharply increased. It is important for us to answer questions from parliamentarians, artists and the public on what we do with that money.

By way of introduction, I would point out that the council has undergone a radical transformation since 2015. That major change began in 2015, when I became director of the council. Since I had previously been its vice-chair for 10 years, I was already familiar with the organization.

The purpose of that transformation was essentially to simplify programs and to ensure the council provided more support to artists in accordance with their wishes based on different, more future-oriented business models. Here are a few figures to illustrate the scope of the change. When I became director, the council was managing roughly 150 programs. Today we have 6. The duties of approximately 70% of the council's employees have been changed to enable them to work differently, to act differently and to expand the council's influence in the arts community.

[English]

Then in 2016 we released a strategic plan. The title is “Shaping a New Future: Strategic Plan 2016-2021”, and there were four big commitments in that strategy plan.

The first one was that we would increase our support to artists, collectives and organizations striving for artistic excellence and greater engagement in the arts by an increasingly diverse public.

The second commitment we made was that we would amplify the quality, scale and sharing of Canadian art through digital technology.

The third one was that we would invest to renew the relationship between indigenous artists and indigenous and non-indigenous audiences for a shared future.

Finally, the fourth big commitment we made at that time was that we would raise the international profile of Canadians art and artists.

Each of these commitments was supported by very specific targets in order to make it happen.

[Translation]

On March 22, 2016, the Government of Canada decided to double the council's budget over five years. That resulted in an additional appropriation of approximately \$550 million to 2021, slightly more than half a billion dollars, in the arts sector. An investment of that scale has never happened in the council's history. We have very clearly announced our financial intentions to the community and to the Canadian public.

[English]

The first thing we wanted to achieve was to modify the distribution of funds. Before the doubling of the budget, in every year there was a high proportion of our funds that was locked into ongoing operating grants, and there was very little flexibility and less and less flexibility at every level of the system—both at the municipal level and the provincial level—to accommodate projects and to open the doors and the windows to diversity.

There was a sense that things were not moving a lot and that the Canadian art system would less and less reflect the society that supports it, so we wanted to make sure that we would bring more flexibility into the system with the new money and that we would move the needle from roughly 67% going to core funding to 50-50, and we are already almost there.

We also made the announcement that we would take a portion of the new money, meaning \$88.5 million, to create a very important digital strategy fund in order to help the art sector to transition, to adapt, to cope with the digital possibilities and capacities that we have in Canada and worldwide.

●(1550)

We also made the commitment that we would triple the investment to support indigenous creation, and not only augment the investment but rethink and reframe the way we do the support to make sure that it will be done less from a Eurocentric perspective and more according to indigenous world views with a program that is completely administered by a staff of indigenous descent and indigenous peers.

Finally, we made the commitment that we would double, over five years, the investments of the Canada Council for access to international markets.

We also made a very significant commitment that 88.5% of all the new money that the Canada Council receives will go directly to artists and arts organizations. That was a very bold commitment, because it meant that the bulk of the money would not serve to develop more bureaucratic capacities but go directly into the sector.

As of last month, the council had received, so far, \$225 million, or 41% of all the new money I mentioned, the \$550 million. As of today, in the arts system in Canada, \$202 million, or 90% of the money we received, has been directly invested and distributed across Canada for artistic groups and arts organizations and to support projects. It's a big change. It's a big revolution in terms of the arts system.

It's clear that one of the difficulties with an announcement such as this one is that it generates a lot of expectations. First, most of the artists who heard that the budget was doubled thought it was happening overnight, not over five years. There were a lot of needs expressed and there were, again, a lot of expectations. Some of them were unrealistic, but our duty and our responsibility is to deal with all of those expectations calmly, with empathy and understanding, and to explain the choices we made. It's clear that it was impossible for the Canada Council to make decisions in terms of augmenting the support for indigenous creation. Reinvesting in diversity, we made the commitment that 25% of all the new money we would get would go to first-time recipients. It was impossible to make all those commitments, and at the same time satisfy the expectations of everybody across Canada. We would have needed billions of dollars to do that.

What is really important is that we made choices, and I can say now that we made very strong inroads in terms of reconciliation, in terms of creating new possibilities for our Canadian artists and arts organizations on the world stage, in terms of growing and consolidating what I could call the independent artistic scene across Canada, and in terms of inviting and supporting new artists and new voices across Canada.

[Translation]

One of the unrealistic expectations currently under considerable discussion is the regional distribution of council funding.

As a federal funding agency, the Canada Council for the Arts invests in provincial, municipal and local ecosystems that are highly diversified in the funding they receive, the size of organizations in those ecosystems and their funding history.

[English]

Every time we invest in Canada, we are aware that it is in very different contexts across the country, and contexts that are ever-changing, because the Canada Council represents only one portion of all the public money invested, and the level of investment and the way the cultural ecosystem works is very different from one province to another.

●(1555)

What we are trying to do, in fact, is not to come to a point where we would create a system in which public funding would be equal in every province in Canada. It's impossible to achieve—

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Steven Blaney): Mr. Brault, I will allow you another minute, and then we will go to a round of questions.

[English]

Mr. Simon Brault: What we want to do is make sure that the success rate is equal. We want to make sure that anywhere in Canada—in Caraquet, Iqaluit, Montreal, Rimouski or Toronto—any artist applying to the Canada Council would have the same reasonable chance to get funding.

The rate of success is the successful applications relative to the number of applications that we get. At this point, I can say that the rate of success is absolutely comparable in Canada. Over the last three years, we did not make any significant shifts in terms of how the money is distributed on a regional basis. In fact, the only shift that happened was less than 1%.

I will conclude by saying that we are living in a very interesting moment right now. We are on target in terms of the goals we expressed and the investment targets that we released, explained and published three years ago.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Steven Blaney): Thank you very much, Mr. Brault.

Without further ado, I turn the floor over to Mr. Boissonnault, who is eager to ask you some probing questions.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Brault, thank you for being with us today.

[English]

I'm going to switch to English because I have lots of things to say for my people back home. I'm channelling a mentor, a great Edmonton and Canadian musician and talent, and a distinguished senator, the late Tommy Banks.

[Translation]

Mr. Brault, we know each other well because I was previously parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

[English]

I have to say that I like your work and I love what the CCA stands for. I like that the Canada Council for the Arts funds the Edmonton Opera, the Alberta Ballet, the Winspear Centre for the arts, the Citadel Theatre and many other worthy organizations in Edmonton and Calgary.

What I cannot stand for are the numbers, Monsieur Brault. If we look at the numbers and the principle of regional equity, the Canada Council for the Arts is categorically failing Albertans.

Let's take a look at the numbers. After we doubled the funding for the Canada Council for the Arts.... I will share this, and I will send a document that has been helpfully prepared by the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts—because they have enough money to do this kind of data crunching, and western arts groups do not.

Here are the numbers for 2017-18 for arts organizations funded by the CCA, per capita: Toronto, \$16.62; Montreal, \$30.73; Vancouver, \$35.39. How much did Calgary get? It got \$4.73. How much did Edmonton get per capita? It got \$4.56.

Let's take a look at the provincial lens for the same year and the same funding, a year after the beginning of the doubling of the funding: British Columbia, 14.7%; Ontario, 32%; Quebec, 31%. Alberta got 5.7% of the funding.

On every single indicator—and this includes population, artists, assessors and funding—Alberta is at the bottom of the barrel. We are 12% of the population. We have 8% of the artists, 5% of the assessors, and just over 5% of the funding.

Monsieur Brault, how are you going to do regional equity, which is what the doubling of the funding was intended to do? I want to see more francophone artists. I want to see more indigenous artists. I want to see more LGBTQ artists. I am not seeing in the data a 25-year consistent underfunding of Alberta arts organizations moving a single needle. What are you and your organization going to do to address this egregious discrepancy in funding?

Mr. Simon Brault: The first thing I want to say, and I think it's really important, is that the per capita rationale cannot work. It can't work because of the way the Canada Council is operating: We are responding to the requests we get. When you think about the per capita argument and you really push that argument to the limit, it's a very dangerous argument in a country like Canada, because you have a huge concentration of the population of artists in a very few cities.

The Canada Council is now investing in thousands of communities in Canada, and in fact, if you follow this per capita logic, you would come at the end of the day to concentrate your funding in four cities in Canada, and that's it, because that is where the artists are concentrated at a very high level.

What we try to do.... You're right that when you compare Alberta and B.C., especially, because they have more or less the same population size and number of artists and all that, you see that there is an issue there. I will give you—

• (1600)

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: The issue is a three times funding difference.

Mr. Simon Brault: I will give you an example.

What we call an “institution” is an organization that has a budget of more than \$2 million, so it has a certain size of operation. In Canada right now, the level of Canada Council funding that goes to institutions is roughly 22%. In a province such as Quebec, it's 13%; in Alberta, it's 46%.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Brault, I'm going to have to pause you there, because I have only six minutes.

Mr. Simon Brault: Yes.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: If I get some more time, we're going to go back to what artists in my province call the “cabal” that has been set up.

Mr. Simon Brault: Yes.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Here is the issue: You can't be a juror, an assessor, with the Canada Council for the Arts unless you actually have funding from the Canada Council for the Arts.

Mr. Simon Brault: It's not true.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Have you changed that?

Mr. Simon Brault: Yes, absolutely. It has been changed.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Brault, we have artists who have tried and failed for 25 years to get funding from the CCA. It's not because there's no good art in Alberta.

Mr. Simon Brault: I absolutely agree with you, but it's not true.

We need to realize that the issue with Alberta is something that I'm very familiar with. We are very concerned about that situation. What we want to do is grow the demand from the bottom up to the Canada Council.

Actually, we are moving the needle. The needle is moving. We have more applicants than before. We have a success rate that is progressing right now.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Brault, the logic doesn't hold. You had a surplus in 2018 of \$49.3 million, yet we have artists who want more money. Where is the money going?

Mr. Simon Brault: I'm sorry; we did not have a surplus. The surplus you saw in the financial statement is a surplus on paper because of our investment. It has nothing to do with the money we had to spend.

As I said before, 90% of the new money we got has been spent and is right now in the hands of arts organizations and artists across Canada. All the provinces and all the regions of Canada have more money now than they had two years ago.

However, what is a difficult and complex issue is that we need to address the very uneven arts system in Canada on a lot of issues.

I had the chance to do a town hall in Alberta, and yes, I get some people who are unhappy; I also get a lot of letters from people who are very happy right now, because what we are trying to do is to support and grow what we could call the “independent artistic scene” and what we could call the “middle class” of the arts system in Alberta. We realized that it is very difficult to sustain an ecosystem where half the money would go to a handful of institutions.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Before I run out of time—

Mr. Simon Brault: We are addressing it. We are very serious about that.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Steven Blaney): Mr. Boissonnault, your time is up.

I will now turn to Mr. Shields as the second member to ask questions.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Steven Blaney): You are more than welcome.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you for being here today.

As you mentioned, the Alberta Ballet had a beautiful performance last night with Joni Mitchell at the NAC. I'm glad to see the Alberta

Mr. Simon Brault: I was there.

Mr. Martin Shields: It was a beautiful performance, and the combination with the Joni Mitchell music is fantastic. I'm glad to see that co-operation.

As you mentioned, there are some issues in the sense that it's a bit like the chicken and the egg with the money. If the money traditionally flows to certain markets, the artists flow to certain markets. If the money flows elsewhere, the artists will be elsewhere.

Mr. Simon Brault: I agree. I know that problem well, because before being at the council, I was the head of the theatre school for years and years.

The level of application and the level of theatre training in Alberta was, and still is, very strong. I witnessed during 30 years a lot of very famous artists who moved elsewhere.

Mr. Martin Shields: Great, so—

•(1605)

Mr. Simon Brault: The question is that you need to have an independent scene that is strong enough to retain those talents, and that is what we're trying to build.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you.

You said the money goes by application, so the money has followed the applications to this point.

Mr. Simon Brault: Yes.

Mr. Martin Shields: Could you tell me how many applications you received and how many were turned down?

Mr. Simon Brault: The success rate in Alberta right now is close to 42%, so it's quite good.

In terms of numbers of applications last year—

Mr. Martin Shields: Is that an average across the country, 42%?

Mr. Simon Brault: In terms of the average, as I said, where we are right now, the success rate is quite comparable for project grants. For artists applying, the numbers are quite similar in Canada, so there is no type of discrimination in that area.

Mr. Martin Shields: Right, but were 42% successful in Alberta?

Mr. Simon Brault: Yes.

Mr. Martin Shields: Or turned down?

Mr. Simon Brault: No, 42% were successful.

Mr. Martin Shields: Is that similar to the average in other provinces?

Mr. Simon Brault: That's more or less what it is. Let me find the exact number, but it's comparable.

Mr. Martin Shields: While you are doing that, do you have a connection with the NAC and funding to the NAC?

Mr. Simon Brault: No. We have a partnership with the NAC, but we do not fund the NAC. We partner on some projects. The NAC is a Crown corporation, and the Canada Council is a Crown corporation.

Mr. Martin Shields: The NAC now has a new staff person. There are actually two. Their role is indigenous performances.

Mr. Simon Brault: Yes.

Mr. Martin Shields: Yet those staff have no money.

Mr. Simon Brault: I won't comment on the situation at the NAC, but what I want to say is that when I was at the launch of the season, I realized that almost all the projects that will be presented in the first season are supported by the Canada Council with our program.

Mr. Martin Shields: That's my point, in the sense that it makes it tough. They have staff over there, but they have no money, and they're attempting to develop a program, right?

Mr. Simon Brault: Yes, but they have the program. The Canada Council has a program, but our program is to fund indigenous arts across Canada—

Mr. Martin Shields: Right.

Mr. Simon Brault: —to be presented across Canada, including on the stage of the NAC in the context of the indigenous program.

We welcome that program. We think it's really important. We're investing heavily to make sure that the work that will be presented there will be of top quality.

Mr. Martin Shields: Right.

I want to go back to the first part, about the money following the artists. As you said, artists are concentrated in the same places. How do you envision seeing that change? What are you doing to change it?

Mr. Simon Brault: What we are trying to do right now is... Our motto is more or less “Let’s not do more of the same with the new money,” so we opened up and we accepted a lot of new applicants. We accepted a lot of new organizations that now receive ongoing funding from the Canada Council, and every year we protect a significant amount—roughly half of all of our budget—for projects and new possibilities that are coming from anywhere in Canada.

This is really important, because we were at a point five years ago where the money was committed on day one and there was not a lot of room for movement. Those who were supported by the Canada Council were very happy, but there were no possibilities to enter the system. What we are doing right now is opening the system more and more. We’re multiplying the entry points.

We do a lot of outreach, actually, in Alberta. In every province where we see that there is not enough support at this point, we focus the work. We kind of said to our staff, “You should spend the majority of your time not with the actual clients but with the new possible clients.” We think it’s really important, because the demography of Canada has changed, and you’re right that there are regions where the level of applications and the level of support from the Canada Council is too low. Our top priority is to make sure that we reverse that situation, but you cannot do it overnight.

Mr. Martin Shields: I understand that.

Mr. Simon Brault: It’s coming—

Mr. Martin Shields: Are you saying that you’re going to do an outreach so that groups understand the application process—

Mr. Simon Brault: Absolutely, yes.

• (1610)

Mr. Martin Shields: —and understand that something is different today than it was yesterday?

Mr. Simon Brault: Absolutely.

For years, we were not doing a lot of outreach because there was no money to offer. It’s serious. If you meet artists and you say, “Apply, apply, apply,” and there’s no money to respond to the applications, you’re kind of a....

There is money now. We need to spend that money, and because we made commitments, as I said, that 25% of the new money would go to first-time recipients, we need to train them on how to write—

Mr. Martin Shields: Do you have it written in your strategic plan?

Mr. Simon Brault: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Martin Shields: Will you submit your strategic plan to us, then?

Mr. Simon Brault: Absolutely, and everything I said today.

All the numbers and the crunching of numbers, by the way, from people in Toronto is taken from our website because we are, I think, an exemplary organization with its numbers, and I can say worldwide, because I’m working on the world stage too—

Mr. Martin Shields: Yes.

Mr. Simon Brault: Canada Council is very transparent with its numbers, so absolutely, we will do that. We report in a very *maniaque* way on how we deliver the commitments because we are

very clear that with the money we receive, we need to make sure we’re delivering.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Steven Blaney): Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Shields.

Yes, Monsieur Brault, we can see how well documented your numbers are.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nantel, the floor is yours.

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, Mr. Brault.

Mr. Simon Brault: Good afternoon, Mr. Nantel.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thank you for being here today. It seems to me you’re having a tough time testifying because we’re questioning you intensely, although I bet you were prepared for that.

Mr. Simon Brault: You can’t keep the heart from loving.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: That’s exactly right. You definitely love all those artistic disciplines, and we know you have all the necessary experience.

I imagine you were prepared to answer all these questions. After all, you received a fantastic budget, which may even be a model to the rest of the world given the importance of art in society. Some people question that. I hope I’ll get a chance to talk to about the cuts to the number of programs and about their substance and the impact they’re having on the communities, particularly on community pride.

First of all, I’d like to say I’m uncomfortable with the questions you’ve been asked about funding, more specifically about the province and city of one of my colleagues on the Standing Committee of Canadian Heritage, particularly since he’s on the government side. It’s the same as if I were a government member and, knowing my city needed \$3.5 million to renovate a cathedral, I had worked hard to bring in someone from Canadian Heritage who specifically dealt with those matters.

We all know there’s no shortage of work on the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. We’ve refused to discuss a number of topics that would have been entirely appropriate in the current situation, which is characterized by a paradigm shift. The entire cultural sector seems very pleased with the report on our copyright study, but it would’ve liked us to propose interim measures to rectify certain inequalities relative to the Internet giants. They also wanted to hear about cultural diversity and dissemination adjustment models.

As you can see, Mr. Brault, I’m giving you a break.

Mr. Simon Brault: You’re letting me find the figures that the member from Alberta requested.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: That’s perfect.

We could have used a lot of things. I honestly do understand why we had to welcome Mr. Brault today to discuss his budget, but I think it's a bit much to discuss that subject from the outset. At any event, you can say you have nothing to hide. Mr. Brault, you've been very frank. You've made your arguments very clearly. I believe the artistic community in your area must feel that it has a good representative and that he has defended it well. I just find it a bit much that you've been questioned this way.

You say you went from nearly 150 programs to 6. Could you help us get a clearer understanding of what types of programs they are? What are the various artistic disciplines? Are there organizations, festivals, artists and municipalities? Who gets support from the Canada Council for the Arts?

Mr. Simon Brault: The council used to organize its programs by artistic discipline. For example, there were 26 different programs for all kinds of theatre-related activities. The same was true of visual arts, and there were all kinds of detailed literature programs. So we had extremely granular suites of programs. That was attributable to the fact that the council had decided to create a new program for every new discipline or artistic activity that emerged in the landscape, and that went on for 60 years.

• (1615)

Mr. Pierre Nantel: So you adjusted your programs accordingly.

Mr. Simon Brault: However, it got to the point where, after examining developments in the arts sector, we concluded we could have created 100 more programs over the past four years to recognize all the other artistic disciplines.

So we decided to stop using that approach and to introduce non-disciplinary programs. This is also being discussed internationally, and, to put it simply, international is international, regardless of artistic discipline, be it theatre, dance or visual arts.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: It's a program in itself.

Mr. Simon Brault: So we have a program to support our artists internationally. Then we have a program to provide support for indigenous arts and another for dissemination in Canada. We also have the explore and create program, which focuses on artistic creation and is intended for all artistic creation companies. And we have a program for medium-sized groups and organizations that provide ongoing programming. Lastly, we have a program that focuses on business model innovation in the arts. These programs are currently in effect.

Rather than ask people who they are and in what artistic sector they operate, the council asks them what their project is about.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: I've known many artists who were very proud to have sat on the peer assessment committees, which have always been the hallmark of the Canada Council for the Arts.

Mr. Simon Brault: We still use that system.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: How does it work for presenters, for example? Do they sit down at the table and make decisions?

Mr. Simon Brault: We still work with peers. Last year, some 550 peers came to Ottawa to conduct assessments. We use the same assessment system, but the way to get into the system is less focused on the person's discipline — theatre, for example — and much more on the nature of what that person does.

What we would expect from an organization such as the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, which is an institution, is very different from what we want from a company consisting of three persons, say a choreographer, his best friend and another dancer. All organizations used to have to meet the same criteria and requirements, which was a major disadvantage for many companies. So we cleaned up the programs and simplified access to them.

We've been using this model for two full years now, and, frankly, I must say we've vastly improved the situation. We had to do it because the council and everyone were stuck. You nearly needed a sherpa to find your way through the programs. Now it's something we can explain to anyone. Artists, particularly the new generation, don't have the patience to deal with the old bureaucratic systems. We had to simplify matters in order to become more efficient.

Now I'd like to respond briefly to the member from Alberta.

[English]

While Mr. Nantel was making the introduction, last year in Alberta we received 606 applications, and the success rate was 44.2%, an increase of 8% over the success rate from 2015-16, so there is progress there.

However, I must add, just to explain the question of demand, that in B.C., the same province, the number of applications we received was 1,866. We don't decide that. It comes from the artists. The success rate in B.C. was the same, so the question of demand, for us, is the real question. This is where we are investing our efforts right now.

Canada Council is not creating art; Canada Council is recognizing and responding to projects that are formulated by artists. This is why we focus and we are travelling and criss-crossing Alberta and other provinces right now, to make sure that people hear about us and understand and gain more capacity to apply. We're there to respond, and the money is there. The good news is that over the last three years, we started by making permanent reinvestments in organizations. Now the big chunk of the money is money that is uncommitted, so there is real hope in terms of developing, and this is what we're working on, with honesty and passion.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Steven Blaney): Thank you very much, Mr. Brault. We can feel your passion.

[English]

We'll go on with Mr. Hogg.

Mr. Gordie Hogg (South Surrey—White Rock, Lib.): Thank you very much. It must be an exciting time for you, with a growing budget. I'm sure the responsibilities that come with that, as you're telling us here today, are substantial as well.

You mentioned the number of people who apply being a reference point for you. You talked a bit about how you publicize that. You've changed the definition of your mandate—or rather, the mission statement remains the same, but you seem to be reflecting a more values-based approach that gives you more flexibility to respond to it.

Based on that values-based response or approach, what are the ways you're getting that message out? If we go across Canada, would most artists know about it? What are the connections? How do you do that?

• (1620)

Mr. Simon Brault: I must say that the Canada Council is an organization that is very well known across Canada, especially by artists. Just to give you a sense, one of the programs we are administering on top of the other six is the public lending right commission. It's 17,000 writers in Canada who get a grant from the Canada Council every year because their books are present in the library system.

We obviously use social media. We travel a lot across Canada. We partner with local arts councils, because there are arts councils in every province in Canada. Actually, all of them are here in Ottawa today, because they are at the Canada Council for training sessions.

We partner with local municipal arts councils and co-organize sessions with them most of the time, since we have more money. We organize town halls to meet people, explain the program and debate the philosophy. There's a huge outreach that did not exist before, because there was no new money, so there was no point. We were in a very defensive mode, and it was “No, no; there's no access to council.”

Now our responsibility is to get the money out the door and make sure it is in the hands of the artists, and this is how we do it.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: I'm assuming you're conveying that message as well.

Mr. Simon Brault: Yes.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: You've made a decision to further support artists, that 50% of your funding is going to go directly to artists.

Mr. Simon Brault: Yes.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Is that working out well in terms of the applicants coming and the percentage, and all of that? It's a dramatic amount of money and a dramatic shift in the things you're doing.

Mr. Simon Brault: It's a good question. As I said, because the money was incremental over five years, we started by reinvesting first in organizations. There are hundreds and hundreds of organizations supported by the council. Now that this job is almost done, most of the new money every year is for projects. That is why we're now making a huge push everywhere in Canada to be out there talking with the artists and inviting them to apply.

We've committed 25% of the new money for first-time recipients. That's a lot of money. It's \$137 million for people who never got a

grant from the council. For people who have been saying it's impossible to get a grant, it's not impossible right now. It's very highly possible. We have a success rate that is higher than ever, obviously, with the new money. It's a time of artistic renaissance in Canada right now, and indeed you should see that.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: You made reference to thinking that we're one of the gold standards around the world. What can we learn from the rest of the world in terms of similar things? What countries or what areas are doing better than we are? What can we learn from them?

Mr. Simon Brault: It's a good question. After learning a month ago that I had a second mandate at the Canada Council, I was elected—the first time for a Canadian and a francophone—chair of the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies, which includes 90 countries in the world that have funding systems similar to Canada's. I must be very honest and say that for the rest of the world, we are a beacon right now. People are watching what is happening in Canada.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Is there nothing we can learn from them?

Mr. Simon Brault: It's because we are reinventing ourselves, and we did not take all the money to give to the people who were already entitled to it.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: My time is going quickly here. I'm going to give a few seconds back to Mr. Boissonnault.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Steven Blaney): Oh, no.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: “Oh, no”, you're saying.

As I understand, the Auditor General's report didn't recognize any deficiency—

Mr. Simon Brault: No. We were very pleased.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: —but they made recommendations that you improve corporate management practices and the management of grant programs. With all of these changes taking place, those seem pretty significant and important recommendations.

What have you done to implement those recommendations coming from the Auditor General?

Mr. Simon Brault: We have almost finished the work, because a lot of those recommendations addressed the old funding model. The new funding model has been crafted to answer those deficiencies.

Frankly, at this point, we're on track on every recommendation. It was a very important report for us. I'm a fellow accountant; I know about auditing. I knew it was a nightmare to have that audit, that special exam, exactly in the middle of the transformation. The good news for all of us, for the community and for the Canadian public, is that it confirmed that we had the right direction.

One of the biggest recommendations is around IT systems. As you know, because you live in Ottawa—

•(1625)

Mr. Gordie Hogg: No, I don't. Thank goodness, I do not.

Mr. Simon Brault: —IT systems are very *en retard*. We're working a lot on that to catch up.

On IT, I won't lie: This is a very big issue everywhere in Canada and with the government.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Yes. It's a big issue to maintain the flexibility with the new changes.

Mr. Simon Brault: Yes, exactly.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Mr. Blaney, I'm going to turn it back to Mr. "Oh, no".

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Steven Blaney): You have one minute.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: One minute is good. Maybe I'll get some more time later from another colleague or in the second round.

Monsieur Brault, is the regional equity model of funding a priority for the CCA?

Mr. Simon Brault: Yes, but from the perspective of the artists. I'm not working with per capita, because I cannot work with per capita.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: I agree with you.

Here are some things, and I'll submit this to the record: Canada Council funding to Canada's four largest cities, to your point, per artist, for Montreal was \$4,200 per artist; for Toronto, \$1,800; for Vancouver, \$2,700; and for Calgary artists, \$1,200.

Are Calgary artists inferior to artists in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver?

Mr. Simon Brault: Not at all, and those numbers don't work, for a very good reason. When you count an artist, there's a big distinction between what an artist is and what an artist who could be supported by the Canada Council is.

For instance—

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: You just said the equity model is based on artists, and this isn't equitable.

Mr. Simon Brault: No, it's artists who are eligible for the Canada Council.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Steven Blaney): Perhaps we'll have a chance to come back to this subject later if some of the members agree to share their speaking time with you, Mr. Boissonnault.

We will now begin our second round of questions.

[English]

I'm going to turn to my colleague, Mr. Yurdiga.

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Just looking at my community, I remember that not all communities are created equal. For example, in Fort McMurray the industry is very active, and we see the municipality and local businesses contributing to the arts, but when you go further north, the northern communities don't have that luxury of support. The thing that I'm concerned about is the programming, the flexibility. In an isolated community up

north, there may be a 100 people, and they don't have the resources to pool to qualify for anything.

In the case of operating grants, let's say, what provisions are there to enhance that community to be able to do something regarding the arts?

Mr. Simon Brault: It's an excellent question. Your question is very important because it helps to debunk the discussion on per capita. If we look at the far north just on a per capita basis, we would not even pay attention to it, but we do pay a lot of attention to it because we think it's a moment in history when we need to give capacity to create to artists no matter where they are—and not to create for the south, but first to create for themselves, and then eventually for the south and for the rest of the world.

A lot of the work we do right now is to make sure that we do have a presence in those regions. We do send program officers. We do develop capacities to apply. We do simplify our programs. When you look the work that is done for certain communities in terms of supporting them to apply to the Canada Council compared what we do in Montreal and Toronto, it is six or seven times, but we think it's a good investment to make.

Actually, this summer, in August I will go personally to do a second big round in the north with some program officers to see where we are. We are very, very proud to say that over the last three years, we have significantly augmented our investments in the north, everywhere in Canada. What we try to do is make sure that we support first and foremost the organizations that are led by indigenous people or local people and that we support them on their own terms in their own context and not try to apply to them rules or context or models of business that may fit in big cities but don't fit in the north.

For us it's a priority. We have targeted funds to make it happen. I think we're making serious progress there. I'm pleased to say that if you read the reports from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, you'll see that one of the very rare recommendations that has been completely implemented was the one concerning the Canada Council.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you for that.

You know, one of the biggest challenges for any organization, even for programs within the communities, is the application process.

Mr. Simon Brault: Sure.

•(1630)

Mr. David Yurdiga: A lot of them are very intimidating.

Mr. Simon Brault: Yes.

Mr. David Yurdiga: A lot of them are—

Mr. Simon Brault: That's why we try to simplify it as much as we can.

Mr. David Yurdiga: We have a lot of people not applying just because—

Mr. Simon Brault: True.

Mr. David Yurdiga: —they're familiar with the old system.

Mr. Simon Brault: Absolutely.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Then how has the application process changed? What have you changed in the application process to make it more user-friendly?

A lot of groups have professional grant writers. They are way above everyone else, but the northern communities don't have that luxury.

Mr. Simon Brault: I'm smiling because when we took the decision to reduce and simplify the grant application process, we had all of the young people, people from the north, people who were not really well advantaged by the system, applauding, and we had big organizations that were very frustrated because they could not explain at length what they wanted to do.

To be very concrete, we reduced the number of words. We asked for explanations. We also worked with juries that are aware of the context and know the artists. They can just judge on what is written on the paper, but they know the track records of the artists. Again, I'm not saying that everything is perfect, because I think we have more and more work to do to reach out to people and explain the Canada Council.

Again, this is work that we have not been doing for 20 years because there was no new money and there was no interest in having newcomers in the system.

It's exactly the reverse right now. The reverse right now is our priority is to make sure that we remove all the barriers. We did that. For instance, we published what has been the most visited section of the website of the Canada Council ever. We published a communique saying that we are removing all the barriers that are related to the formal number of years of artistic practice and all of that, because we saw that this was disadvantaging people from some regions in Canada and was also preventing refugees and immigrants from applying to the Canada Council. We removed those barriers, and we are moving from a culture in which we felt we were under siege and were gatekeepers to a situation that we think is about outreach, meeting people and inviting them to apply, and we have the money to respond.

I think that it will change the arts system for the better.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Steven Blaney): Thank you very much, Mr. Brault.

[*English*]

Thank you, Mr. Yurdiga.

[*Translation*]

I now turn the floor over to Ms. Dhillon.

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): I'm giving my time to Mr. Boissonnault.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: How much time do I have, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Steven Blaney): You have exactly 4 minutes and 48 seconds.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Thank you.

I just want to tell my honourable colleague on the other side of the table:

[*English*]

I'm not going to take any advice from any member of Parliament in the House or around this table about how and when to defend Edmontonians or Albertans, and in this case Edmontonians and Albertan artists who have been disadvantaged for almost as long as I've been alive.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: I'll do the same.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: I know.

[*English*]

And I know Mr. Brault probably comes from your

[*Translation*]

riding.

[*English*]

Mr. Simon Brault: I want to say something, and it has nothing to do with... I want to say the issue with artists and the issue with Alberta is something that is really serious. We really want to address it, but we need to understand how the machinery works there.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Go ahead. I won't disagree on that.

Mr. Simon Brault: Can I give you just one number?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Yes, you have 20 seconds.

[*English*]

Mr. Simon Brault: When you think of the institutions, do you know the proportion of the Canada Council funding for a Quebec institution today? It's 17%. Do you know what the percentage is for an Alberta institution? It's 23%.

The reason is that the Canada Council is over-investing because the level of public funding is not there at the provincial and at the municipal level at the same level.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Okay. I'll stop you there. That's not true—

Mr. Simon Brault: It's an important point—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Brault, the City of Edmonton has doubled its funding.

[*English*]

Mr. Simon Brault: And I'm very happy with it—

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: The problem with Alberta and the funding is...this is my time. Let me ask the questions.

• (1635)

Mr. Simon Brault: Yes.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: I want to extend an olive branch, because I think you're trying to do really important work and I want to see this resolved in my lifetime.

On your tour, would you come to Edmonton and do a round table? I will sit next to you. I will moderate.

Mr. Simon Brault: Absolutely. Any time. I went already—

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: I'll be there like a bridge. I will be there as a bridge to the Alberta community.

Mr. Simon Brault: I will, with great pleasure.

You know what? I did that already.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: In Edmonton?

Mr. Simon Brault: No. I did Calgary the last time, because I was going to Banff, but I will do it in Edmonton any time.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: It's a standing invitation. Let's go and listen to the community.

Mr. Simon Brault: Sure.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: My pen is down, so the arms are down. If the pen's out of my hand, then I'm all good. It's like scaling Mount Olympus. That is what Alberta artists and...

[Translation]

Mr. Brault, I lived with my first partner

[English]

for seven years. He paints like Michelangelo. He sculpts like Rodin. He tried for eight years and failed every time. He made multiple attempts at grants every year—fail, fail, fail.

Then at his last, last, last attempt for the Winter Olympics, he decided to take an Olympic idea but made it a hockey player, naked. He called it *Slapshotolus*, and he was able to get an \$80,000 grant from the Canada Council for the Arts, but that was after 10 years of trying.

Stewart Lemoine has 72 Canadian plays, 10 Sterling Awards, and the Tommy Banks Award. After 11 years of trying, he stopped trying to get funding from CCA.

I understand the machinery. I understand that 66% of the jurors are from Ontario and Quebec and five are from Alberta, and that's going to build in some inherent bias, but let's figure out what the mechanics are so we can get this addressed.

Mr. Simon Brault: You know what? What was before my time I cannot change.

I'm telling you—and I've spent all my life in this sector—we are doing everything in the world to be fair and to be transparent. I'm working on this question of juries. I also realize that sometimes when I have Alberta jurists, they are tougher on Alberta than others—

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Then let's get into that. It's a good thing to observe. I agree.

Mr. Simon Brault: What I'm saying is that there is no simple solution.

[Translation]

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: I agree.

[English]

Mr. Simon Brault: It's a systematic approach. I think that what we are doing right now in terms of where we put the money, in terms of outreach in Alberta and in terms of inviting the artists, with the success rate that I mentioned.... It's not a joke. One out of two is quite good, because you also need quality. I think we are doing the

right thing, and I think it has already produced, as I told you, a 10% increase in terms of success in Alberta over three years. That's quite good.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: I will say that's a step in the right direction.

Mr. Simon Brault: Your life will probably be longer than mine, so you will see the change.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Let's work together.

Mr. Simon Brault: Absolutely.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: I'm happy to extend the hand of friendship so that we can get this for Alberta artists.

Mr. Simon Brault: Absolutely, I'll be there with great pleasure.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Go ahead.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Steven Blaney): You have 10 seconds left, Mr. Hogg.

[English]

Mr. Gordie Hogg: You made reference to 67% that was core funding before, and now that's down to 50%.

Mr. Simon Brault: Yes.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: You've reduced your number of programs from 150 to six. Is that correct?

Mr. Simon Brault: Yes.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: As a quantum, it seems to me that you're still spending many more dollars on core funding.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Steven Blaney): We'll get back to that.

[English]

Mr. Simon Brault: We are spending many more dollars on core funding than we used to, but we are fifty-fifty in terms of where we spend the money right now.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Steven Blaney): Thank you very much, Mr. Brault

We will now have a second last tour, depending on the time we have left. I am told we started 15 minutes early, which means we can do a round and a half.

The floor is yours, Mr. Shields.

[English]

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you. I appreciate the dialogue and the questions.

When you talk about 50% core, what is that for? Can you tell me what the core is for, quickly?

Mr. Simon Brault: Core is money that goes to 2,000 organizations in Canada right now—institutions and small and medium-sized organizations—for their ongoing operations.

Mr. Martin Shields: If new organizations are formed in communities, they can apply and still get into that 50%?

Mr. Simon Brault: They can, and this year, in 2018, we accepted 320 new organizations.

At the moment we are favouring organizations that are innovative and that also represent voices that are less represented right now in Canada. We have a big emphasis on diversity and on indigenous culture.

Mr. Martin Shields: What about new communities, though?

Mr. Simon Brault: Absolutely. It's the same thing. They can apply.

Mr. Martin Shields: I'm saying a community. I represent a small city, and they have formed a municipally sponsored arts and culture....

Mr. Simon Brault: This year, in 2018-19, we are in 1,900 communities across Canada, and it can grow.

Mr. Martin Shields: Okay.

I have, in my riding, the second-largest indigenous group in Canada. It's going to be a challenge. How do you get out in that far-flung area and deal with that issue in the sense of communicating what you're talking about?

• (1640)

Mr. Simon Brault: You're right that it's a challenge. At the same time, we committed.... In the context of the doubling of the funds for the council, we're tripling investment in indigenous arts, so there are resources. Our work is to make sure that we work with local partners to ensure that we reach the artists and invite them to apply.

This is really the job we do every day. That's the core of our job.

Mr. Martin Shields: Are you dealing with indigenous people through their national organizations, or do you reach out and partner with the local people themselves?

Mr. Simon Brault: We try to do everything. Sometimes we work with what we call NASOs, national arts service organizations, across Canada, such as the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective. Sometimes we work with local organizations, sometimes national ones. We use every possible way of presenting the council's programs and distributing and sharing knowledge. We do get a lot of support to do it, but we can do more, and we will.

Mr. Martin Shields: I think that's a great challenge and I look forward to more success with that, because I think that there is a gap in trust.

Mr. Simon Brault: I agree.

Mr. Martin Shields: I think you have to build that trust, and I don't think it's there. Another challenge is to find those local artists. They are there, but they don't understand how the system works.

Mr. Simon Brault: At the same time, I think it's fantastic because the Canada Council has been doing work with indigenous artists for 30 years. We are one of the organizations in this country that has the most experience and trust with indigenous artists. I think the question now is to scale up what we do.

Mr. Martin Shields: Excellent.

How much time is left?

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Steven Blaney): You have two minutes, my friend.

Mr. Martin Shields: You talked about digital. We have spent a lot of time talking about digital in relation to different things. What are you doing with digital?

Mr. Simon Brault: Three years ago we did a kind of survey. We tried to see what was happening worldwide with the arts sector. What happened in fact with digital is that the disruption really happened in the cultural industries, in the music industry first and then in film, with digital screens and all that. The disruption was not so much with the arts sector, especially the performing arts, but it is disruptive in the sense that the cultural habits and the way people relate to any content is profoundly changing with digital.

Our fund is to help the sector find ways of coping with that and using the possibilities. We decided that we would create a fund, and that the fund would support initiatives whereby people would partner. It's interesting, because the fund is present everywhere in Canada.

It started, very surprisingly, in the far north, because people were ready to take it. Right now there are probably 250 projects across Canada. There are a lot of collaborations on big data, on access, on ways to be more visible on the web. This is the kind of work we do.

Recently we opened a component to help organizations that wanted to understand where they are from a digital standpoint, and it has been a huge success. A lot is invested right now, and frankly, the Canada Council's fund is one of the most important ones for the arts sector worldwide.

We wanted to do that, and because we are also responsible for supporting the writers of this country and all of that, we really wanted to make sure that we would address that and also protect our investment. The digital fund will be \$30 million next year. It's roughly 9% of everything we invest, but we think that by investing there, we will protect the other 90% of our investment, and if we don't do it, all of that will be at risk.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Steven Blaney): Perfect.

[English]

Thank you very much, Mr. Shields.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Steven Blaney): Mr. Nantel, you have the floor.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thank you very much.

I'd just like to correct something. I'm not giving lessons to my colleague opposite, but the leader of the government delegation, who was accountable to the Canada Council, brought the subject up with his majority, and we didn't have a choice. I found that quite awkward.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Steven Blaney): Your point of order is dismissed, Mr. Nantel.

That brings us to the end of our meeting.

Mr. Brault, I would like to thank you for coming to address our committee. I have two things to say to you. First, you have lowered

the number of your programs from 150 to 6, and I congratulate you for reducing red tape. I also congratulate you on your new mandate.

● (1645)

Mr. Simon Brault: Thank you very much.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Thank you, Mr. Brault.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Steven Blaney): The meeting is adjourned.

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