



REFRAMING THE CULTURAL POLICY DIALOGUE

A SYMPOSIUM PRESENTED
8 JUNE 2015

SYMPOSIUM PARTNERS:

The Arts Advocate
Business for the Arts
Public Policy Forum
Soulpepper
Toronto Arts Council

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Thanks to [@TheArtsAdvocate](#) for a stimulating discussion of culture policy today! [#RCPDialogue](#)

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RT [@MargueriteJutra](#): [#RCPDialogue](#) "Embracing a culture of reciprocity - the age of entitlement is over"

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Thanks to [@TheArtsAdvocate](#) & all panelists for an insightful discussion on Reframing the Cultural Policy Dialogue today!
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Reframing the cultural policy dialogue conference [#RCPDialogue](#) had some fresh ideas, as I blogged at blog.culturalhrc.ca/blog/reframing...

9:20 AM - 11 Jun 2015

INTRODUCTION

Reframing the Cultural Policy Dialogue was a thought-provoking symposium, designed as an opportunity to investigate and discuss cultural policy in the context of current Ontario and federal government priorities. Presented on the cusp of the launch of Ontario's culture strategy consultation and a federal election, participants began to re-imagine a cultural policy framework in the Canadian context to better serve artists, cultural organizations and Canadians.

Hosted by author Terry Fallis, the day offered a strong line up of speakers from government, public affairs and the cultural sector. Their perspectives and observations provided new insights and understanding on how our sector can engage with government and public policy development effectively, creatively and with impact.

In-person and online participants explored options and avenues to strengthen the cultural sector's engagement with governments at all levels. We heard from a speaker central to arts and creative industries advocacy efforts in the United Kingdom and seasoned and senior public servants and policy practitioners in Ontario and Canada. The day concluded with dialogue where artists, cultural thinkers and creative industry leaders imagined a future where the cultural sector is at the table when policy decisions are made in Canada -- great ideas and observations emerged.

With a new federal government that has pledged to invest in the creative industries and the upcoming release of an Ontario culture strategy, there is an opportunity to expand on the ideas and suggestions presented at *Reframing the Cultural Policy Dialogue*. We didn't find all the answers, but we did explore options including greater collaboration that could serve the cultural sector and Canadians better.

Reframing the Cultural Policy Dialogue was a 20th anniversary initiative of *The Arts Advocate*, presented with partners Business for the Arts, Public Policy Forum, the Toronto Arts Council and Soulpepper. It was made possible through the support of the Metcalf Foundation; livestreaming support was provided through the Ontario Arts Council. Our sincere thanks to all.

The
ARS Advocate ²⁰
Micheline McKay
November 2015

“Acknowledging the work that was needed to facilitate this project, more of this kind of dialogue would be valuable to the sector. The information was substantial”



“This was a great opportunity and I was impressed by the excellence of the symposium accessed through Livestream”

REFLECTIONS FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM: FROM ASK TO OFFER

Matthew Taylor, CEO Royal Society for the Arts

It's time to flip our advocacy thinking from "ask to offer," said keynote speaker Matthew Taylor, CEO of the United Kingdom's Royal Society for the Arts.

He argued that for the most part, cultural advocacy focuses on what the arts and cultural sector needs, asking government for special treatment in the absence of rigorous evidence of the benefits of public investment. To move forward, Taylor proposed a new framework based on what the cultural sector uniquely has to offer. He noted that the cultural sector is expert in innovation, collaboration, and engagement strategies and that these and other creative skills are critically needed in order to solve big societal challenges that governments face.

Taylor also said that the current economic arguments to fund the sector, based on things like contribution to GDP, have three problems: evidence linking the investment in arts and culture with the cultural industries is not as strong as it could be and there is reliance on anecdote instead; unlike other industry strategies, it is hard to identify the "problem" that public subsidy in the cultural sector is meant to solve; and the economic arguments which are extrinsic to the arts undercut the intrinsic arguments about the value of arts and culture. Nevertheless, Taylor recommends that these arguments be sustained by the cultural sector, while developing capacity and evidence to make stronger more compelling arguments.

While being honest about the sector's shortcomings, Taylor also proposed that there are fruitful ways forward. The sector must:

- convene locally to decide what is needed, and what can be let go;
- listen to local decision-makers about what challenges they seek to solve and ask how the cultural sector can make a greater contribution; and
- work cross-sectorally and be generous with all that the arts and culture have to offer society.



“Canada has the potential to compete as the most creative economy in the world.”

Rachel Wernick



GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVES

Over the course of two sessions, two Assistant Deputy Ministers provided insight into the policy environment provincially and federally.

Kevin Finnerty, ADM, Culture Division, Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport

Rachel Wernick, ADM, Strategic Policy, Planning and Corporate Affairs, Department of Canadian Heritage

Governments at all levels are grappling with the same issues of profound change sweeping through Canadian demographics, accompanied by the forceful transformations brought about by digital technologies. Government speakers Kevin Finnerty and Rachel Wernick agreed that decision-makers understand that they need policies that are adaptable and sustainable and that government doesn't have all the answers. For the cultural sector, there are opportunities now to work closely with government to shape policy to ensure both the wellbeing of the sector and of the Canadian public.

At the provincial level, Ontario invests \$800 million in arts, cultural industries, cultural heritage and public libraries, leveraging a \$22 billion contribution to the province's GDP. At a national level, the cultural sector contributes \$50 billion to GDP, supported through federal investments of almost \$1.3 billion in Canadian Heritage. This impressive ROI is the thin edge of the wedge in making the case for effective culture policies.

The cultural sector also helps to develop the talent and skills of Canadians. It is a catalyst for fresh thinking and innovation and an indicator of well-being. Culture makes a profound contribution to quality of life and sense of place.

Finnerty acknowledged that the “social benefits of cultural expression and capacity to profoundly change lives and communities are difficult to quantify and are likely greater than we know.” In difficult and competitive fiscal environments, he said it was “vital to find sound and compelling ways to maximize and articulate the economic and social value of culture.” The ability of the arts to collaborate across sectors will be key to securing ongoing public support.

Wernick advised advocates to think about four principles of effective engagement with decision-makers:

- the imperative to frame policy within the economic and digital contexts;
- the need to link proposals to other government priorities;
- the importance of evidence-based arguments placed within the context of a competitive environment;
- the requirement to focus on the public interest.

She said, “in an economic context where the primacy of innovation is increasingly recognized, there's potential to demonstrate to decision-makers that Canada's cultural sector is synonymous with our competitive edge.”

The environment will continue to change dramatically, and the cultural sector has a lot to offer governments and people to adapt and respond to it effectively.

Arts Advocate Blog

It's vital to find “sound and compelling ways to maximize and articulate the economic and social value of culture.”

Kevin Finnerty

BRINGING IT HOME: PERSPECTIVES FROM LEADING CANADIAN POLICY PRACTITIONERS



Fahim Kaderdina, Moderator

David Lindsay, President and CEO, Forest Products Association of Canada

Joanne McNamara, Executive Director, Strategic Projects, University of Western Ontario

Bob Richardson, Executive Vice-President, National Practice Lead, Public Affairs, Edelman

An abundance of experience lay behind comments by the participants in the policy practitioners panel. Their main advice to the cultural sector? “LEAPT,” quipped David Lindsay, “leverage, evidence, alliances, programs, and timing.”

All four speakers agreed that the most important strategy to influencing policy development was to build ongoing relationships with decision-makers based on working towards shared objectives: leverage what’s already going on in the community, even if you or your organization have nothing to gain. That positions you to become the unbiased person to whom government comes to for advice.

Using evidence-based arguments and building alliances within the sector and in the wider community in order to speak with one voice helps to build credibility and create opportunities beyond the traditional cultural funding model.

Creating a program or platform on which to tell the stories and convey the ideas of your advocacy position is an approach that works well.

Being aware of government priorities and commitments and participating as far as your capacity and mandate allow is also helpful. Being a team-player is one way to signal that your organization genuinely seeks to be a partner with government.

Although the expression “shovel-ready” is used only for capital projects, the issue of timing is crucial in all advocacy work. Engaging with government at the beginning of the four-year electoral cycle positions your project or policy to be ready for action when the time is ripe.

During this panel, a wealth of ideas were generated:

- the importance of developing relationships outside the cultural sector;
- using the sector’s “wow factor” to gain attention;
- understanding that government wants to hear solutions even if it can’t deliver every time;
- knowing not to underestimate the intrinsic value of arts and culture; and
- not hesitating to remind decision-makers of the unique offer the sector has to make.

*“The urgent
trumps the important
in politics, the challenge is
to get government thinking
about the important over
the long-term.”*

David Lindsay

CANADIANS VALUE COMPANIES THAT SUPPORT THE ARTS

Nichole Anderson, President and CEO of Business for the Arts



More than half of Canadians favour businesses that invest in arts and culture, according to a new report by Business for the Arts. For the symposium, President and CEO of Business for the Arts, Nichole Anderson, presented a sneak peek at the results of *Building the Case for Business Support of the Arts*. Despite the fact that business investment in the arts has increased 49% since 2008, businesses do not see their own support in the arts as important as does the general public.

The data echoed themes emerging elsewhere during the day. For example, among businesses supporting the arts, most indicate that they are interested less in the return on the investment (ROI) than they are in the *social* return on the investment (SROI) of their support. This, despite not having adequate ways to measure SROI.

There is an opportunity for the arts to develop a set of SROI measures that could include areas that have been found to be important to both the public and to businesses as reasons for supporting the arts. These areas include:

- the benefits the arts provide in enhancing well-being and health;
- the contribution art makes to creating vibrant communities;
- the potential of art to assist disadvantaged youth; and,
- the role of art in enhancing the emotional and intellectual development of children.

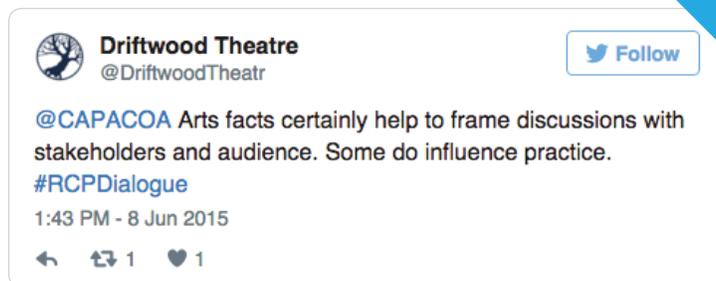
This could be an important step in creating a more compelling, data-driven approach to arts support.

However, Anderson also noted that the research reveals the complex interworking of arts funding in Canada. While Canadian businesses are increasing their investment in the arts, those surveyed emphasize that government support of the arts is essential and only 23% of large companies stated that they would increase support if government cuts occur. There is urgency then to make the case now that investing in the arts is investing in health, education and social services.

88%
believe youth engagement with the arts helps reduce youth crime and alienation.

95%
say arts education assists in the intellectual development of children.

82%
of Canadian businesses believe engagement with the arts leads to good health and well-being.



REPORT LINK:

www.businessforthearts.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Business-Support-for-the-Arts---Making-the-Case.pdf

SO WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN: A RESPONSE FROM ARTISTS AND CULTURAL LEADERS

Zan Chandler, Moderator
 Karen Bachmann, Director, Timmins Museum
 Ella Cooper, Manager, Neighbourhood Arts Network
 Christa Dickenson, Executive Director, Interactive Ontario
 Eric Dubeau, artist
 Vikas Kohli, Executive Director, MonstrARTity



We need to exert pressure on our own constituency to have a voice.”
 Christa Dickenson

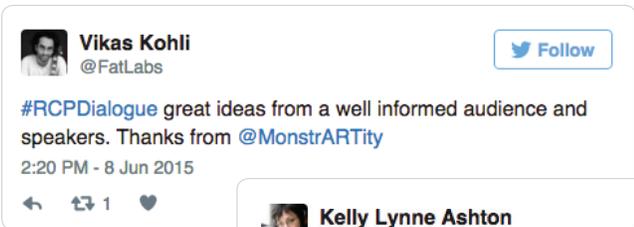
The final panel of artists and cultural leaders reflected on the day’s discussions and what changes are needed to arrive at the desired future for cultural policy and the cultural sector as a whole.

Whether working at the local, provincial or national level, all panelists agreed to the necessity for artists and cultural organizations to be involved in policy development from the idea phase right through to implementation. The old model of exerting pressure on government after decisions are made is not effective. Artists and arts organizations, the heritage sector and creative industries are looking for a dialogue with decision-makers based on finding common solutions to strengthen communities. And, to be compelling, government needs to demonstrate a commitment to consultative platforms where substantial recurring dialogue enables artists and cultural organizations to engage with government over a period of time.

One possible lens through which to think about cultural policy development is as a kind of co-creation with decision-makers. The cultural sector has many assets. For example, the sector is uniquely skilled in bringing diverse communities together. Government could leverage our existing programs in order to include a greater number of viewpoints, including the public, at these consultations and to make for stronger more engaged communities as a result. In return, the cultural sector can ensure that cultural policies value the need for creation time and seed funding as catalysts for art-making. “It’s about embracing an atmosphere of reciprocity at the end of the day and being proud of it,” noted Christa Dickenson.

Harking back to the morning’s keynote, Vikas Kohli said, “Know what your ‘offer’ is and don’t underestimate it.” The cultural sector is digging deeper to understand our ‘offer’, our own social and economic impacts and is poised to co-create our desired future with our partners in government.

“The most soul-sucking part of the past ten years of consultation has been fighting for the status quo. You want to engage me? Let’s talk about the future.”
 Eric Dubeau



CONCLUSION

Claire Hopkinson, Director and CEO of the Toronto Arts Council and Toronto Arts Foundation



Claire Hopkinson wrapped up the day by articulating the dominant themes and messages that emerged. Going forward:

- The environment will continue to change dramatically, and the cultural sector has a lot to offer governments and people to adapt and respond to it effectively.
- Collaboration is key, both in governments and across other sectors. “We do have friends,” said Hopkinson, “we need to harness the wealth of those resources.”
- The cultural sector is urged to ‘dig deeper’ to secure better research and evidence that provides both economic data and tells the story of the intrinsic value.
- There is a need to ‘tell our story better’, and to move away from a defensive, protective posture often evident throughout the cultural sector.
- The sector is urged to ‘listen’ and determine what its unique contribution can be, working to be ‘good partners’ to address bigger problems.

All in all, a great day. Thank you to all our participants, in person and online.

**“A terrific
and unbelievably
valuable day.**

I heard perspectives that will absolutely reframe the way my organization looks at advocacy, and I gained a lot of valuable insight and intelligence. This is one of the best PD sessions I have ever attended.”



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