

FIT-ART PROJECT

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FOSTERING INTEGRATION THROUGH THE ARTS



Learning from
Toronto Arts
Council's Program
for Newcomers
and Refugees

MARCH 2025

This report is the result of the **FIT-ART project**, a research partnership between Toronto Arts Council (TAC) and the Canada Excellence Chair in Migration and Integration (CERC Migration) at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU). This partnership benefited from funding provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

This report is the result of a collaborative effort, and we would like to express our gratitude to all those who contributed to its development.

First and foremost, we wish to acknowledge research team members Anna Triandafyllidou, Canada Excellence Chair in Migration and Integration at TMU, and Kadija de Paula, Senior Manager, Impact & Evaluation at TAC. Both played a crucial role not only in designing the project but also in its implementation.

We extend our thanks to Alice Massari and Evelyn Siu from CERC Migration, who provided crucial support during the early stages of the project. We also thank the members of TAC who supported the project at various stages, particularly Kelly Langgard, Andrew Suri, Liza Mattimore, and Rupal Shah.

We are especially grateful to the members of the FIT-ART Advisory Committee—Sara Asalya, Annie Katsura Rollins, Alka Kumar, Freddy Monasterio, Surranna Sandy, and Cyrus Sundar Singh—who offered their support and feedback throughout the research process. We would also like to thank Naomi Alboim for her thoughtful feedback on an early draft of this report.

Finally, we wish to express our sincere gratitude to the newcomer artists, arts administrators, and settlement professionals who participated in this research, as well as those involved in the knowledge mobilization activities we organized. Their experiences, perspectives, and contributions were fundamental in shaping the findings of this report.

The opinions and arguments expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Toronto Arts Council, Toronto Metropolitan University, or the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This report examines the role of the arts in the integration and empowerment of newcomers to Toronto, highlighting insights from Toronto Arts Council's Program for Newcomers and Refugees (PNR). As Canada increasingly attracts immigrants from diverse backgrounds, fostering their inclusion and success within the cultural and creative sectors becomes critical. While settlement services traditionally focus on essential needs such as housing, employment, and language training, the arts offer unique avenues for skill development, mental well-being, and social connection. The PNR illustrates how targeted arts funding and programming can support newcomers' integration, addressing both personal and professional barriers.

Objectives and Methodology

This report is based on a one-year study that included program data analysis, focus groups, and film-based research with newcomer artists, as well as arts and settlement organizations. The study examined how arts funding supports newcomer integration and aimed to identify ways to enhance this impact. Key objectives included analyzing arts-based projects targeted at newcomer communities, exploring the challenges faced by newcomer artists, and formulating recommendations for stakeholders across the arts and settlement sectors.

Key Findings

Arts as a tool for settlement and well-being

Arts-based programs help newcomers tackle immediate settlement challenges by offering accessible, culturally sensitive spaces for language learning, skill development, and community engagement. Projects funded by the PNR demonstrate that the arts can contribute significantly to newcomers' sense of belonging and mental health, offering a creative outlet for processing past traumas and building resilience.

Empowering newcomer artists

For many newcomers, especially those with artistic backgrounds, pursuing an artistic career in Canada is challenging due to barriers such as non-recognition of foreign credentials, language discrimination, and limited access to networks. Mentorship and grant programs play a crucial role in providing financial support and guidance, helping artists gain a foothold in Toronto's arts sector.

Systemic barriers and the need for inclusivity

While Toronto's arts sector is becoming more inclusive, newcomer artists still face systemic obstacles, including the emphasis on "Canadian experience" in hiring, project-based funding limitations, and biases in selection processes. Additionally, the separation between the settlement and arts sectors limits the effectiveness of support for newcomer artists.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

ENHANCED CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

Encourage partnerships between arts and settlement organizations through co-learning opportunities and dedicated grants that integrate the arts into settlement programming.

SUSTAINABLE FUNDING MODELS

Prioritize multi-year grants to ensure program longevity and establish evaluation frameworks to measure long-term impacts on newcomer integration.

IMPROVED ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Develop tailored resources for newcomer artists, such as informational materials in multiple languages, to guide them in accessing relevant opportunities.

ADDRESSING SYSTEMIC BARRIERS

Arts institutions and funding bodies should value international qualifications, diversify decision-making panels, and support inclusive grant criteria that acknowledge non-Western art forms.

STRENGTHENED MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS

Enhance mentorship structures by providing mentor training, flexible matching processes, and networking events to facilitate lasting professional relationships.



Canada's appeal as a destination for immigrants has grown steadily over the past decades. In 2021, over 8.3 million people, nearly a quarter (23%) of the population, were or had been landed immigrants or permanent residents (StatCan, 2022). Since then, the trend has continued, with over 469,000 immigrants admitted in 2022-2023. The priorities of government and settlement service providers, which include housing, employment, and language acquisition, play a crucial role in integrating newcomers (Okoye, 2020; Kumar, 2020). However, the role of the arts in immigrant integration is often overlooked, despite its potential to address these challenges (Martiniello, 2019). The arts can contribute to socio-economic integration by offering newcomers opportunities to develop new skills, connect with local communities, and build resilience (Wright & Parada, 2019; Allan, 2016). Artistic practices also help newcomers cope with stress, build social networks, and raise awareness of their experiences, challenging stereotypes and enhancing overall well-being (Jones, 2018; Denov & Shevell, 2019; Mijić & Parzer, 2022). Given these benefits, it is imperative for governments and settlement service providers to explore the arts as a tool for supporting settlement and integration, as well as a viable career path that enhances Canada's appeal as a destination for migrants.

Nevertheless, the cultural and creative industries present unique challenges for newcomers. Their competitive and network-driven nature, combined with deskilling and precarious employment, threatens career stability and, by extension, migrant settlement and integration. Many immigrants with strong artistic backgrounds struggle to establish themselves, often abandoning their careers due to systemic barriers such as the non-recognition of foreign credentials and experience (Hellreich & Siemiatycki, 2019; Raihan et al., 2023). This mismatch between qualifications and job opportunities leads to underemployment or low-paid, precarious work (Illesinghe et al., 2020; Andrion, 2022). Further compounded by language barriers, cultural differences, and a lack of networks, immigrant artists and creatives face significant obstacles in navigating the local creative economy and accessing essential resources (Leslie et al., 2013). Although several arts organizations work to empower immigrant artists and provide platforms for showcasing their talents, a gap remains in achieving a fully representative and diverse arts scene (Looker, 2019). For newcomer artists seeking employment in their field, the gap between the settlement and arts sectors presents a unique set of challenges, particularly during their first years in Canada.

INTRODUCTION

Objectives

This report is the culmination of a one-year research project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) that sought to address the gap in empirical research on the role of the arts in integrating newcomers to Canada, with a particular focus on how arts funders contribute to community building, support newcomers and refugees, and facilitate their settlement in Canada and integration into Canadian life. Titled 'Fostering Integration Through the Arts' (FIT-ART), the project was a new partnership between the Toronto Metropolitan University's Canada Excellence Chair in Migration and Integration and Toronto Arts Council (TAC). The project specifically examined TAC's Program for Newcomers and Refugees (PNR),

within which there are two streams: Newcomer and Refugee Arts Engagement (open to organizations and collectives) and Newcomer and Refugee Artist Mentorship (open to individuals). Employing a mixed-methods approach, this project included program data analysis, focus groups, and film-based research featuring in-depth interviews with newcomer and refugee artists.

Synthesizing insights from these artists and the organizations that have launched arts projects under the PNR, we aim to illuminate the role of the arts in newcomer integration and highlight pathways for increasing support for newcomer artists, thereby empowering newcomers more broadly to settle into their new communities.

IN THIS REPORT, WE:

— Analyze how settlement organizations can develop arts-based programs to facilitate newcomers' integration into the labour market and enhance their sense of belonging.

— Discuss how artistic expression can help refugees overcome the aftermath of traumatic events, enabling them to share their stories and transform migration narratives creatively.

— Explore the challenges faced by newcomer artists in Toronto and examine potential supports to facilitate their integration into the creative economy.

— Provide recommendations for arts organizations on how they can better support newcomer and refugee artists, tapping into the diverse cultural richness and creative skills of these communities.

Structure of the report

SECTION

CONTENT

1

The first section examines how arts funding can enhance immigrant integration in Canada, based on an analysis of funding programs in the country's major gateway cities. It also introduces Toronto Arts Council's Program for Newcomers and Refugees (PNR), outlining its origins and key achievements over the past decade.

2

The second section explores the impact of arts-based initiatives, such as those supported through TAC's PNR, on immigrant integration in Canada. It addresses both the immediate challenges these initiatives help to mitigate and the long-term benefits they provide in fostering belonging and conviviality. This section concludes with specific recommendations for funders, as well as municipal, provincial, and federal government bodies, and the arts and settlement sectors, to more effectively leverage arts-based projects for fostering immigrant integration. (PNR), outlining its origins and key achievements over the past decade.

3

The third section focuses on the empowerment of newcomer artists, drawing from the experiences of TAC's PNR recipients. It delves into the challenges they face while establishing creative careers in Toronto's arts scene and identifies the necessary support mechanisms for fostering a more inclusive sector. This section concludes with recommendations to address the obstacles that hinder newcomer artists' integration and to promote a more diverse and inclusive arts scene.



Arts funding is the provision of financial support aimed at promoting and sustaining the creation, production, and distribution of artistic works. This funding can be allocated to individual artists, cultural institutions, and arts organizations to support activities such as creating new works, organizing events and exhibitions, and providing educational opportunities in the arts. Arts funders operate at national, provincial, and municipal levels, and include public, private, and arm's-length organizations. Their roles range from supporting the livelihoods of artists and arts professionals to directing artistic activities towards public interest goals.

Beyond the arts sector, arts funding can engage actors in the settlement sector, encouraging collaboration with artists to leverage the arts as part of their missions—although such opportunities are scarce.

Arts funding can enable a wide range of initiatives that benefit immigrants, from community centres offering opportunities to learn new artistic skills to government-funded projects that bring together immigrants to create public art reflecting the community's diverse cultural backgrounds.

While this report focuses primarily on arts funding, it is not the only source of support for newcomers or newcomer artists. Various networks, such as Local Arts Service Organizations (LASOs), unions, and professional associations, play an equally crucial role in promoting newcomer integration through the arts. These organizations are vital in facilitating social connections, supporting career development, promoting cultural exchange, and advocating for inclusion and representation, all of which are essential for helping newcomers thrive in the arts sector.

Toronto, as a key gateway for immigrants to Canada, is uniquely positioned to develop arts funding programs targeted at immigrants. However, the lessons learned from TAC's PNR also have broader relevance for other cities and regions exploring how arts funding can be leveraged for integration. Therefore, it is important to situate the PNR within the wider context of arts funding in Canada before delving into its origins and operational framework.

LEVERAGING ARTS FUNDING FOR INTEGRATION

Arts funding and immigrant integration in Canadian cities

To identify relevant arts funders with programs benefiting immigrants, Toronto Arts Council (TAC) provided 2022 data on arts funders and funding programs across Canada. From this information, 148 arts funders were identified, offering a total of 1,127 grant opportunities. A review of community-focused programs and a list of arts funders revealed a limited number of funders specifically targeting immigrants. Consequently, we conducted a detailed analysis of these funders, examining how their programs may benefit immigrants.

Our analysis focused on how each funder supported immigrant communities, either through direct targeting, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) criteria, or community-oriented initiatives. We prioritized Canada's major "arrival cities," which welcome the majority of newcomers: Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary, Ottawa, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Halifax, Saskatoon, and Regina, based on 2022 data. We outline three key strategies that arts funders can employ to support immigrant integration. First, dedicated programs targeting immigrant communities can directly impact their integration. Second, incorporating Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) criteria into organizational practices can make arts funding more accessible to immigrants. Third, allocating resources to community-building and placemaking in neighbourhoods with high immigrant populations can also foster integration.

Arts funding programs targeting newcomers

The information provided by TAC revealed that just over one-quarter of arts funders in Canada (26%, n=39 of 148) have funding programs targeted at specific groups or communities. These groups include Black or racialized people, Indigenous people, Deaf or disabled individuals, Francophones, immigrants and refugees, and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals. Of these funders, 82% targeted Indigenous people, while less than 7% targeted immigrants and refugees.

SPECIFICALLY, ONLY 2% OF CANADA'S ARTS FUNDERS HAVE PROGRAMS EXPLICITLY FOR IMMIGRANTS.

Examples of such funding programs include:

— **VIVACITÉ, CONSEILS DES ARTS ET DES LETTRES DU QUÉBEC** This program provides funding for Canadian citizens and landed immigrants with a minimum of 12 months in the country. Applicants must be members of a visible minority. The funds are available for various artistic disciplines, supporting professional artists who represent cultural diversity. Notable recipients include Atna Njock, a Cameroonian-Canadian musician blending various music genres, and Kim-Sanh Chau, a choreographer who used the grant to create a piece in Ho Chi Minh City.

— **YUKON'S NEW CANADIAN EVENTS FUND** This fund supports public festivals and events celebrating the cultures of new Canadians. In order to apply, organizations must have a multicultural mandate or be involved with a cultural activity, and must express their interest in helping new Canadians integrate into living in Yukon.

— **CONSEIL DES ARTS DE MONTRÉAL'S CULTURAL DIVERSITY SECTION** This program provides arts funding and residencies for racialized and diverse-background artists, including immigrant artists. The Intersections program offers a three-month residency at the OPTICA Centre for Contemporary Art to immigrant artists who are also members of an ethnic or visible minority.

— **ARTS NEW BRUNSWICK** This organization now offers arts grant opportunities for immigrants with pending permanent resident applications. This widens the net to include more newcomer artists, providing support to those who are in a transitional period and wish to develop their art practice.

— **ARTS NOVA SCOTIA'S ARTS EQUITY FUNDING INITIATIVE** Through this initiative, support is allocated to emerging and established artists who belong to designated communities that have historically faced barriers in accessing funding, including racialized people.

— **EDMONTON ARTS COUNCIL'S EQUITY ACCESS IN THE ARTS FUNDING SCHEME** This scheme provides funding for Indigenous and racialized peoples, as well as those facing systemic barriers, including disadvantages due to immigration status.

Additionally, some arts organizations have created programs to support immigrant and newcomer artists beyond funding through the facilitation of workshops, networking and exhibitions.

Some examples of these programs include:

ARTS NETWORK OTTAWA'S MULTICULTURAL ARTISTS' COALITION (MAC) The MAC operates as a professional arts organization shaped by and for BIPOC and newcomer artists, increasing their visibility in the local arts scene. Some opportunities facilitated by the MAC have included an Art Exhibition and Fall Showcase, Art + Summer Workshop (2022), Community Capacity Workshop for Immigrant/Refugee Artists (2019) and Women+ Art Festival: Immigrant, Refugee and Racialized (2019)

IMMIGRANT COUNCIL FOR ARTS INNOVATION (ALBERTA) This council was created with the purpose of connecting newcomer artists and arts and culture workers to Alberta's existing arts scene. Although the council does not provide funding for immigrant and newcomer artists, they do facilitate an Immigrant Arts Mentorship Program, and support organizational tours, exhibitions, performances, cultural celebration activities, mentors-in-residence, and training/workshops/networking events.



Hinprov's Newcomer Artists Improv Workshop Conducted by Janice Jo Lee. Photo by Shreya Parashar, 2023

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in arts funding

A significant number of arts organizations and funders have adopted Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) frameworks within their mandates. Efforts to diversify staff within the arts funding organizations and adjudication committees have been made across the sector. For example, the Canada Council for the Arts, Canada's national public arts funder, launched a Recruitment Campaign to Foster Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in 2021, aimed at hiring staff that reflect greater workplace diversity. Similarly, organizations such as the National Arts Centre, Telefilm Canada, and SOCAN have incorporated EDI criteria and strategic plans into their mission statements.

The formulation of EDI criteria by arts funders often serves as a signaling mechanism. The applicants who are being targeted for this EDI criteria might be traditionally underrepresented or marginalized within the arts sector. For instance, the Canadian Media Fund has implemented a Persona-ID system, allowing individuals to self-identify their demographics as part of its Equity and Inclusion Strategy. The National Arts Centre's Equity, Diversity, and Anti-Racism Plan for 2023-2026 focuses on building a culture rich in diversity within the organization. And, the Multicultural Council of Saskatchewan integrates multicultural values into its Strategic Initiatives, promoting diversity, rejecting racism, and fostering integration and intercultural connections through its programs. Many arts funding bodies also include EDI criteria in their general grants, explicitly considering applicants from equity-seeking groups. When EDI is a factor in grant allocation, funders typically request applicants to voluntarily complete self-identification forms. This allows EDI strategies to be implemented during the selection process.

— In British Columbia, the Intercultural Association of Greater Victoria has implemented a Biking Program for Newcomers. In this program, groups of newcomers head out into their communities in the Victoria area, learning about their neighbourhoods and connecting with Indigenous history.

Arts funding in immigrant neighbourhoods

Arts funding directed toward arrival and marginalized neighbourhoods can serve as an indirect means of supporting immigrant communities. For instance, the City of Halifax's Neighbourhood Placemaking Program provides training, guidance, and financial support to community members, enabling them to implement initiatives that foster inclusion and collaboration. One such project, the North Commons Plaza, includes "community-driven artwork" that reflects the importance of and inclusion of Indigenous, LGBTQ+, and African Nova Scotian communities. Arts Nova Scotia also provides support to organizations, groups and individuals to develop community based and socially engaged art projects through their Artists in Communities program, which can greatly benefit immigrant communities.

In British Columbia, the Intercultural Association of Greater Victoria has implemented a Biking Program for Newcomers. In this program, groups of newcomers

head out into their communities in the Victoria area, learning about their neighbourhoods and connecting with Indigenous history. This program allows for newcomers to connect with their new surroundings and meet other new members of their communities. Also in British Columbia, the South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services organization holds a Welcome / Home Art Exhibit, where local artists are paired up with recent immigrants to create an art project and ultimately connect with their new community and neighbourhood.

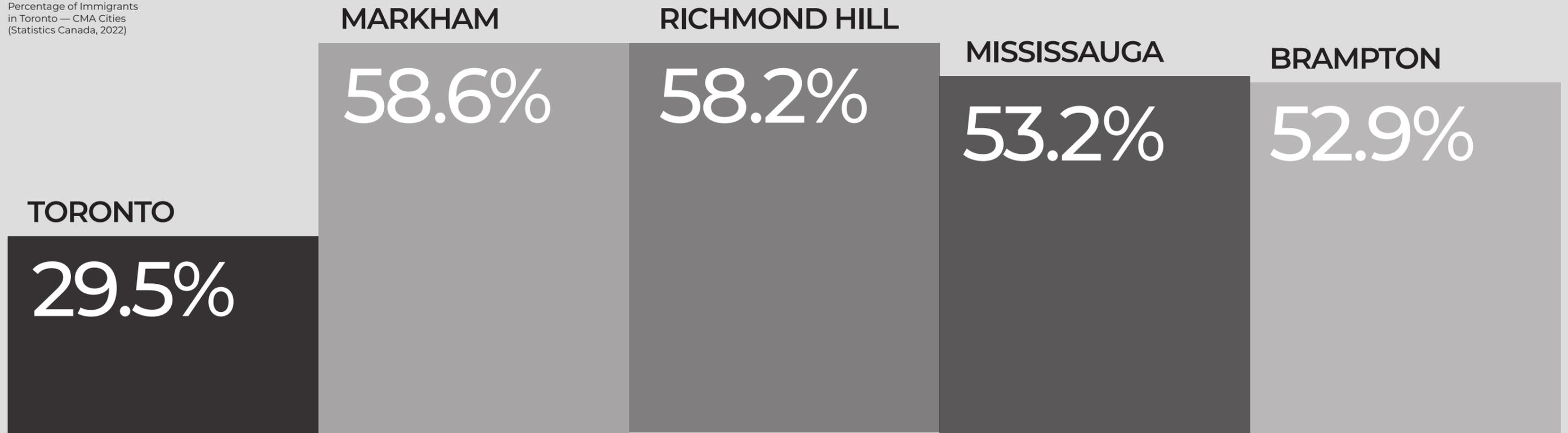
Another example is PlazaPOPs in Scarborough, which develops pop-up installations in plaza parking lots around the area. This initiative promotes community building and interaction, particularly in neighbourhoods with significant populations of racialized groups and immigrants.

1.2

The genesis Toronto's arts strategy toward newcomers and refugees

Toronto, one of the most diverse cities in Canada, welcomes the largest share of recent immigrants, with 29.5% of newcomers settling according to Statistics Canada (2022). In 2021, nearly half (46.6%) of Toronto's population were immigrants, with some municipalities within the Toronto CMA, such as Markham (58.6%), Richmond Hill (58.2%), Mississauga (53.2%), and Brampton (52.9%), having even higher proportions. Despite the city's diversity, Toronto's cultural scene has historically been shaped by a legacy of Eurocentric cultural policies that influenced the formation of institutions. During the 20th century, government arts policy and programming were traditionally grounded in Western European, upper-middle-class concepts, while "ethnic" or "folk" art forms were largely unsupported or unrecognized, and Indigenous cultures were actively suppressed (Louis & Burns, 2012). In recent years, a movement to embrace community-driven art has emerged, leading to symbolic efforts to acknowledge diverse cultural aspirations and reflect Toronto's cultural diversity. (WCCP, 2022).

Percentage of Immigrants
in Toronto — CMA Cities
(Statistics Canada, 2022)



1.2

THE PROGRAM AIMED TO ADDRESS ARTS ACCESS ISSUES FOR NEWCOMERS AND REFUGEES, ALIGNING WITH TAC'S FOCUS AREAS AND STRATEGIC PRIORITIES. IT FURTHER SOUGHT TO EXPAND THE INCLUSION OF DIVERSE ARTISTIC VOICES, STRENGTHEN ACCESS TO ARTS-MAKING OPPORTUNITIES FOR BOTH AUDIENCES AND ARTISTS, AND DEMONSTRATE URBAN LEADERSHIP BY INCREASING THE VISIBILITY OF TAC'S GRANTS WITHIN DIVERSE COMMUNITIES.

Founded in 1974, Toronto Arts Council (TAC) is an independent arts funding organization that operates at arm's length from, but on behalf of, the City of Toronto. TAC's mission is to support artists and arts organizations through responsive and innovative granting programs. Over the years, TAC has grown to become one of the largest arts councils in Canada. In 2023, TAC delivered \$23,583,007 in grants to 511 arts organizations and collectives and 400 individual artists.

TAC's commitment to diversity and inclusion has been evident since 1992 when it commissioned a report on Cultural Equity by E.A. Julian. This report led to significant changes within TAC, including increased representation of people of colour and Indigenous artists on grant program committees and the Board. One key initiative in this early focus on diversity and inclusion was the CultureForce project, designed by poet and consultant Lillian Allen. This project brought together artists, arts organizations, cultural workers, and communities to acknowledge and advance Toronto's diverse cultures. It addressed the structural and aesthetic effects of racism in arts funding and included previously excluded communities in decision-making processes. Several years ago, TAC eliminated language commonly used in traditional funding structures. Titles like "officer" and terms such as "jury" were intentionally replaced to avoid using policing-related language. Instead, more inclusive terminology was adopted to foster a more welcoming and accessible environment.

In 2009, TAC's Visioning Document highlighted the need for funding allocations to reflect Toronto's demographic changes, as visible minorities made up nearly half of the population (TAC, 2016). Reaching out to newcomers was identified as a complex and resource-intensive task requiring attention (CoT, 2011). In 2013, TAC's sister organization, Toronto Arts Foundation (TAF), released a study exploring barriers to arts access, Transforming Communities through the Arts, which found that newcomer artists face significant challenges such as finding work, understanding arts funding, navigating the Canadian arts landscape, and balancing their artistic

practice with settlement issues. In response to these challenges, TAF, in partnership with RBC Foundation, launched the RBC Newcomer Artist Spotlight program in 2015. This continuing initiative includes the Toronto Arts Foundation Newcomer Artist Award offering micro-awards of \$2,500 to newcomer artists, and "Let's Talk Art," a series of professional development workshops designed to connect and inspire Toronto's new generation of cultural leaders.

In 2017, responding to a key aim from its strategic plan "Arts Making 2025," TAC's Board passed Toronto Arts Council Equity Framework. This document guides TAC's work, articulating key equity principles and practices, and addresses systemic barriers that have historically limited the participation of underrepresented communities in the arts sector. The framework emphasizes support for artists from diverse backgrounds and prioritizes increased access and participation for newcomer and refugee artists through specific programs.

In this context, the need for a program dedicated to newcomers and refugees, offering grants to individual artists and organizations working with these communities, became evident. In February 2016, TAC convened a focus group of 28 professionals from the arts and settlement sectors to inform the design of an initiative aimed at supporting newcomers and refugees in Toronto. The group emphasized the urgent need for mentorships for newcomer artists and targeted funding for organizations working with these populations. Following the focus group, TAC staff conducted further research and interviews on arts mentorship programs and funding models, consulting with representatives from agencies such as the Toronto Newcomer Office, the Metcalf Foundation, and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

As a result of this consultation process, on June 17, 2016, then Director of Grants Beth Reynolds, recommended to TAC's Board of Directors the launch of a new strategic funding program in 2017 in partnership with Toronto Arts Foundation through one of their strategic initiatives, the Neighbourhood Arts Network (NAN).

Announced on December 1, 2016, the program was designed with two components:

Claire Hopkinson, then Director & CEO, acknowledged in the announcement that "Toronto's arts and culture community is deeply enriched by the contributions of newcomer artists," and that "these programs recognize both the cultural contributions of our newcomers and the barriers they face."

NEWCOMER AND REFUGEE ARTS ENGAGEMENT

This component provides targeted support to organizations and collectives with significant experience working with and engaging refugees and newcomers through the arts. It aims to facilitate the integration of these communities into Toronto through arts engagement.

NEWCOMER AND REFUGEE ARTIST MENTORSHIPS

This component offers support for newcomer and refugee artists to develop and advance their artistic practice. It creates opportunities for these artists to integrate into and influence Toronto's arts sector, as well as to secure paid, meaningful artistic and collaborative opportunities.

Introducing Toronto Arts Council's Program for Newcomers and Refugees

From its inception in 2017 until 2023, the PNR has allocated \$2.92 million in grants to 40 different organizations, including settlement agencies, arts organizations, and community arts groups through the Newcomer and Refugee Arts Engagement program, and to 176 individual artists through the Newcomer & Refugee Artist Mentorship program¹. Both the Mentorship and Arts Engagement components share a single application deadline, and the same peer assessment panel, composed of artists with expertise in community engagement and settlement issues.

TAC defines a newcomer as an immigrant who has lived in Canada for less than seven years. This definition was adopted based on community feedback and consultations before the program's launch. However, the definition continues to be debated, with some members of the newcomer artist community advocating to extend it to include anyone who has been in Canada for ten years or less. As with all TAC grant programs for individuals, to be eligible for programs applicants must be recognized as professional artists and be based in the City of Toronto. Yet, TAC does allow for some flexibility in interpreting eligibility criteria in order to take into consideration the specific situations of newcomer artists.

¹The initial annual budget allocated to the PNR was \$250,000, with \$150,000 dedicated to artist mentorship grants and \$100,000 to arts engagement grants. Over time, the total budget for these programs has increased to \$440,000.

Photo by Mahsa Alikhani



1.3

NEWCOMER AND REFUGEE ART ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM — 2017 - 2023

\$1.16M
TOTAL ALLOCATION

40 RECIPIENTS SUPPORTED THROUGH 58 GRANTS

94%
of recipients from Equity Priority Groups

Successful applicants receive

\$20K

COVERED EXPENSES

- ARTIST FEES
- TRAVEL EXPENSES
- PREPARATION TIME
- MATERIALS
- OTHER PROJECT-RELATED EXPENSES

PROJECT DURATION

GRANTS AWARDED INITIALLY

GRANTS AWARDED EXPANDED

12 MONTHS

5 PER YEAR

UP TO 10 PER YEAR

The Newcomer and Refugee Arts Engagement program allocated \$1.16 million from 2017 to 2023, supporting 40 recipients through 58 grants, with 94% of them self-identifying as belonging to TAC's equity priority groups. Successful applicants receive \$20,000 to realize their project within a 12-month time frame. While the program was initially funded to allocate five grants per year, it later expanded to up to ten projects annually. The grant covers artist fees, travel expenses, preparation time, materials, and other project-related expenses. Eligible applicants include organizations and collectives with a proven track record of engaging refugees and newcomers through the arts.

Applications require a project description, which summarizes the project, articulates the artistic vision, outlines objectives, provides a work plan, describes the engaged community, and lists key contributors. Assessment criteria include the involvement of newcomer community members and professional artists in the project's design and implementation, the artistic merit and innovation of the project, the quality of experience it offers, its capacity to support newcomer integration, the applicant's experience with newcomer communities, and the project's financial viability.

Based on our analysis of the public list of recipients of the Newcomer and Refugee Arts Engagement Grant, they can be categorized into three groups: settlement organizations, community arts organizations, and arts organizations².

— **SETTLEMENT ORGANIZATIONS** have received grants supporting the inclusion of arts-based projects into their existing services. For example, the Afghan Women's Organization's project "Toronto's Wanderers" invited newcomers to explore their connection to the city through nature, food, culture, art, and community. Another example is Matthew House's project, which offered a Refugee Artist-In-Residence program to lead a mural project, art workshops, and an animation project sharing refugee stories.

— **COMMUNITY ARTS ORGANIZATIONS** have been supported for projects engaging newcomers. For instance, Sabbara's feminist art project involved drama therapy, writing monologues, and acting workshops, culminating in a documentary about participants' stories. Meanwhile, TB West Community Services' "Me and We" dance program offered Latin-influenced dance workshops for newcomer youth of Afro Latino and Latino descent, blending traditional dances with modern Hip Hop and rap.

— **ARTS ORGANIZATIONS** have received support to empower newcomer artists. For example, Small World Music's "Newcomer Encounters" is a professional development program that facilitated knowledge-sharing and mentoring from past graduates. Another example is Waard Ward's "Roses for Scarborough," a public artwork and rose garden on the University of Toronto Scarborough campus integrating floristry, decolonial research, and newcomer engagement to support community building.

² All the examples cited in this section are drawn from the list of beneficiaries and projects in TAC's 2022 Annual Report.

1.3



● NUMBER OF ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

Source: TAC Smartsimple, N&R Engagement applications data from 2017 to 2023

FIGURE 1
Location of the TAC Newcomer and Refugee Engagement Grant recipients — 2017 - 2023

1.3

NEWCOMER AND REFUGEE ARTIST MENTORSHIP PROGRAM — 2017 - 2023

\$1.76M
TOTAL ALLOCATION

176
RECIPIENTS

91%
self-identified as belonging to TAC's equity priority groups

Grant per pair — artist + mentor
\$10K

15-30 MENTORSHIPS PER YEAR
(Program Expansion)

Between 2017 and 2023, the Newcomer and Refugee Mentorship Grant awarded 176 recipients. Of these, 91% self-identified as belonging to TAC's equity priority groups. These grants have a set amount of \$10,000 divided equally between the newcomer/refugee artist and the artist mentor with a total allocation in this period of \$1.76 million. Initially designed to support 15 mentorships per year, the program was later expanded to accommodate up to 30 newcomer artist beneficiaries annually. The grant supports professional artists at any career stage paired with mentors who have relevant qualifications. It aims to support the development of newcomer and refugee artists and to create opportunities for their integration and influence within Toronto's arts sector. Applicants can receive support from Toronto Arts Foundation's Neighbourhood Arts Network (NAN) to determine their mentorship needs and find a suitable mentor.

Applications must include a description of the applicant's artistic practice and experience, an outline of challenges they face as newcomer artists and how the mentorship will address them, a mentor's rationale for participation, a detailed work plan, and an assessment of the expected outcomes and impact on the applicant's artistic development. Applications are assessed through a peer review process by a panel of practicing artists who evaluate the artistic merit of the application, the mentorship's potential to support the applicant's integration into Toronto's arts community, the meaningfulness of the mentorship experience, and the mentor's qualifications. The panel also considers the applicant's self-defined artistic goals, available resources, and stage of artistic development, prioritizing those who face barriers due to their status as newcomers or refugees.

The Newcomer and Refugee Artist Mentorship Grant has supported a diverse array of artists from various countries and disciplines, reflecting the rich variety of artistic practices within the newcomer community. Examples from 2022 include:

— A producer from Argentina collaborated with an experienced Canadian songwriter-producer, helping him build a network in the Canadian music industry.

— A refugee artist from Uganda, known for founding his country's first extreme metal band, received support to work with a local musician to integrate into Toronto's metal music scene.

— A young filmmaker from Iraq enhanced his directing and screenwriting skills under the mentorship of an award-winning Canadian filmmaker.

— An Iranian printmaker was guided by an established artist to integrate into Toronto's visual arts scene, and a Mexican fashion and costume artist created a collection of editorial pieces with the help of an experienced mentor.

Our analysis of the histogram in Figure 2 shows the great diversity of countries that beneficiaries come from. This map was created based on the biographical statements provided in their applications.

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

ARTIST COUNT

IRAN

29

SYRIA

13

INDIA

10

TURKEY	6
IRAQ	5
JAPAN — PAKISTAN — COLOMBIA	4*
EGYPT — NIGERIA	3*
ERITREA — RUSSIA — VENEZUELA PERU — SUDAN — CHILE ETHIOPIA — SOUTH KOREA — CUBA BANGLADESH — BRAZIL — FRANCE	2*
MEXICO — JORDAN — SENEGAL ZIMBABWE — ARGENTINA CHINA — PALESTINE DJUBOUTI/SOMALILAND MOROCCO — LEBANON EL SALVADOR — VIETNAM GABON — PHILIPPINES UKRAINE — SOUTH AFRICA HONDURAS — JAMAICA UGANDA — INDONESIA	1*

* EACH COUNTRY



FIGURE 2
Origins of recipients of TAC Newcomer and Refugee artists mentorship grants — 2017 - 2022

A significant proportion of recipients come from only a few West Asian countries: 29 artists from Iran, 13 from Syria, 6 from Turkey, and 5 from Iraq, collectively representing 40% of the recipients. Beyond this group, recipients are distributed globally, but there is a clear predominance of artists from the 'Global South' or 'non-Western' countries. Notably, artists from East and Southeast Asian countries are relatively underrepresented compared to their populations and their numbers in overall immigration to Canada. Furthermore, nearly one quarter of PNR beneficiaries did not come directly from their countries of origin to Canada but followed complex migration pathways before choosing to resettle here.

Among reasons for choosing Canada as their new home, approximately one third of recipients have fled conflict zones or faced persecution due to their political activities or identities. Many of these artists lived in multiple countries before eventually settling in Canada. For instance, an artist from Syria fled during the crisis, living in Turkey and Lebanon prior to arriving here. Similarly, an artist from Eritrea escaped political persecution, spending time in Sudan and Sweden before finding refuge in Canada. Another artist from Uganda, persecuted for their sexual orientation, resided in Kenya before settling in Canada.

Artists who did not relocate for political reasons seldom explicitly discussed their decision-making process for choosing Canada in-depth within their application to the grant. However, focus group testimonies highlight two main additional motivations: family considerations (such as accompanying their partners) and the pursuit of economic and artistic opportunities.

Source: map created by the authors.

1.3



FIGURE 3
Artistic disciplines practiced by recipients of the Newcomer and Refugee Artist Mentorship Grant — 2017 - 2022

Photo credits
 TBD

Source: TAC Smart Simple, N&R Mentorship applications (2017 to 2023)
 Note: Artists may practice multiple disciplines

Examining the variety of artistic disciplines among the newcomer artists benefiting from the program reveals further diversity. Through our focus groups, we engaged with practitioners from various fields, many of whom were multidisciplinary artists, and endeavored to represent the challenges and needs of newcomers across different disciplines. It is also important to note that many artists we engaged with worked and created across various artistic disciplines. For instance, a performer from Vietnam specializes in musical theatre, combining dance, music, and acting. Another artist from Uzbekistan is a community-engaged visual artist who specializes in both murals and illustration.

Career stage is also crucial in understanding challenges for newcomers. Many artists in our focus

groups were already established in their home countries, such as a multidisciplinary artist from Senegal with a decade of experience as a professional animator and artist who has exhibited work internationally, as well as a professional opera singer from Iran who performed in notable venues and festivals. Other grant recipients were at a more emerging stage. Some of these recipients had undergone a career transition, either working as an artist only upon arrival to Canada, or working odd jobs outside of the arts field as they could not be financially stable when working solely as artists.

A REPLICABLE MODEL FOR

NEWCOMER INTEGRATION?

Arts funding is a powerful tool for fostering immigrant integration, providing both material and symbolic support for newcomers. As demonstrated by various funding programs and initiatives across Canada, arts funding can serve as a bridge for immigrants to engage with their communities. However, to date, only a small percentage of arts funders specifically target immigrants and refugees. The experience of Toronto Arts Council in developing the Program for Newcomers and Refugees offers valuable lessons for other cities and regions. By expanding targeted funding programs, incorporating Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) criteria, and fostering community-building initiatives in immigrant-rich neighbourhoods, arts funders can significantly enhance newcomer integration and contribute to a more vibrant and inclusive cultural landscape in Canada.



SUPPORTING NEWCOMERS THROUGH ARTS- BASED PROJECTS

This section delves into the lessons gleaned from organizations and collectives that have benefitted from the Newcomer and Refugee Engagement Grant. These organizations have implemented projects addressing the needs of newcomers through arts-based initiatives. The guiding questions we explored were: What insights can we gain from their experiences? How have they navigated the challenges they encountered? What solutions have they implemented?

As highlighted in the previous section, a diverse array of organizations have undertaken projects through this grant. Settlement organizations that received this grant, while primarily focused on essential services for newcomers, have integrated the arts as a supplementary element in their broader efforts. Similarly, arts organizations that may not initially prioritize newcomers have developed targeted projects to engage these communities. As for community arts organizations, which represent the majority of the beneficiaries of this program, they operate at the intersection of arts and social work, and play a critical bridging role.

Their projects utilize a wide range of artistic mediums, pursue diverse objectives, and cater to varied audiences. They range from a music incubator empowering newcomer musicians to a collaborative community garden that brings together newcomer and local communities. Storytelling, in various forms—whether through creative writing or multimedia—has been a prominent tool for expressing and sharing experiences. Other projects in the visual arts defy traditional categories, blending crafts, fine arts, and innovative forms of creativity.

We will first explore the multifaceted role of the arts in the settlement and integration process of newcomers. By examining the role of the arts in settlement, we emphasize the importance of a holistic approach that addresses both the immediate needs of newcomers and their long-term well-being. For arts organizations, this requires adaptability and responsiveness to the specific challenges newcomers face.

Next, we will discuss how the arts contribute to integration by fostering a sense of belonging, facilitating interactions, and celebrating newcomer cultures. Furthermore, we show how the arts can empower newcomers to challenge stereotypes and advocate for systemic change that benefits the broader community.

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2.1

Mobilizing the arts for addressing newcomers' settlement challenges



Photo by Hamed Tabein

A holistic approach to settlement

Newcomers face many immediate challenges such as access to housing, employment and childcare. However, settlement is a complex, nonlinear process, and some aspects of a newcomer's settlement cannot be delayed. For example, language and communication skills, along with mental health and well-being, are crucial as they serve as gateways to other facets of integration. These factors can either propel individuals toward a positive trajectory or trap them in a cycle of difficulty.

Analyzing the projects undertaken by community arts organizations with support from the Newcomer and Refugee Engagement Grant reveals a crucial insight: arts organizations can address pressing, immediate concerns. Community arts professionals are well-equipped to tackle these challenges, provided they have the necessary resources. For instance, representatives from grant recipient organizations emphasize the importance of offering interpreters to facilitate communication and foster a safe, inclusive space. Programs can be conducted in English, but also in participants' native languages, which can help them adjust.

Other practical measures, such as providing meals, compensating for transportation, and adjusting workshop schedules to participants' availability, help create an accessible and welcoming environment.

Multiple organizations shared how they adapted their arts programs to accommodate the specific time constraints faced by newcomers. A representative from a music organization working with newcomers highlighted the importance of flexibility: "People are trying to make ends meet... working in jobs, trying to put food on the table, so they don't necessarily have time to attend life enrichment classes during the day... We adjust timing to meet participants' schedules... for example, meeting on Monday evenings when restaurants might be closed for those working in hospitality." Similarly, a representative from a settlement organization offering arts entrepreneurship services stressed the need to align programs with the lives of newcomers: "Timing is one of the challenges...we make our scheduling around parents' schedules to facilitate the programs...we make the schedule fit around their lives."



Photo by Sumera Quadri

FOCUS

NEWCOMER DANCE TOO

The Newcomer Dance Too initiative serves as an excellent example of how community arts organizations can adapt to the specific challenges faced by newcomers while forging strong partnerships with the settlement sector. This project offered free dance classes for newcomer women with refugee backgrounds and girls living in Flemington Park. The program addressed several key barriers, such as the need for childcare, language difficulties, and food security. As the program representative explained, "Women can't just come out unless they have daycare for their kids." In addition to providing childcare, and to encourage greater participation, the program included a healthy snack component that not only provided nourishment but

also helped bond the participants: "There was a dance portion and a healthy snack component to encourage bonding and also encourage women to come [to the workshops]."

Cultural sensitivity was also a priority. The promotion of dance classes was tailored to be inclusive of various languages and ethnic groups. "We called it exercise to Bollywood or exercise to Egyptian music... we wrote it in Arabic, Urdu, Punjabi... we had different translators work on our flyers." The program was run in partnership with other organizations and supported by social workers to help participants overcome the challenges they faced. "Everything was in partnership, nothing was done with just us... social workers supported us."

This example illustrates that community arts organizations are not separate from the settlement world. Instead, they can play a complementary role, adapting to the specific challenges faced by newcomers, and adding significant value to the overall settlement process.

Photo by
StoryCentre Canada



Skills acquisition and pathways to employment

Skills acquisition and pathways to employment are crucial in the early stages of settlement. Newcomers often have to acquire communication skills in a new language, and develop the competencies necessary for employment and livelihood. While these are core missions of settlement services, arts-based projects offer innovative and promising approaches to support these needs.

One of the most critical aspects of skills acquisition is language learning, as communication is vital for daily life. Language barriers can hinder access to employment and complicate other facets of integration. Community arts organizations have developed creative language acquisition strategies that differ from traditional English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom teaching. These arts-based methods not only build language skills but also foster confidence and connections, which are essential for successful communication.

Artists and arts organizations often emphasize the role of non-verbal communication in the arts, which

can help newcomers express themselves freely, even as they are still learning the language. For instance, an Iranian refugee artist shared how art helped her build connections in Canada: “When I came to Canada in 2018, I was able to use art to connect with people. It was like a language that allowed me to form bonds with others.”

Many community arts organizations design their programs to be multilingual, offering participants the comfort and flexibility to learn at their own pace. For example, a representative from the Waard Ward art floristry initiative explains, “We run all of our workshops and programs in both Arabic and English.” Likewise, a representative from the Hinprov performance collective highlights how improvisation allows newcomers to express themselves without requiring extensive language skills. By blending art with different languages, the organization creates a space where newcomers can share their cultural stories and feel connected to a community.

FOCUS

STORYCENTRE CANADA

StoryCentre Canada offers an exemplary model of how arts-based projects can support language acquisition and skills development. As a representative explains, “Many people feel more comfortable expressing themselves through the arts, especially if English isn’t their first language. There’s another language they can use—a visual language.” The digital storytelling workshops provided by StoryCentre Canada empower participants by teaching them new skills in photography, video editing, and storytelling. These workshops not only enhance technical abilities but also offer a platform for participants to share their personal narratives in a supportive environment. This creative approach to education builds confidence in both language skills and cultural expression. As a StoryCentre Canada representative notes, participants

have the flexibility to tell their stories in their native languages or in English, allowing them to practice language skills in a non-intimidating, conversational manner: “We do digital storytelling, where people share their own personal stories of lived experience. We give them the tools to tell these stories, whether in their own language or in English if they want to practice.” As the digital storytelling workshops teach participants technical skills in video production, they can open doors to employment in the media and creative industries. The representative from StoryCentre Canada shared that many of their previous participants have gone on to work in the arts sector, using the skills they acquired during the workshops.

PNR-funded projects play a crucial role in helping newcomers acquire new skills and enhance their employment prospects. Many of the workshops and programs focus on skill-building activities that are directly transferable to the job market, and arts-based initiatives have proven to be highly effective in equipping newcomers with practical skills that boost their employability.

Through training in various artistic disciplines, these projects provide participants with marketable skills that can be applied in professional settings even beyond the arts sector. For example, Kickstart Arts offers an artist training program that helps young newcomers develop skills in the film, television, and theatre industries. This program goes beyond technical instruction by also providing access to professional networks. In addition, the program offers paid placements, internships, and mentorship opportunities, allowing participants to financially sustain their artistic endeavors while gaining valuable work experience.

FOCUS

SMALL
WORLD
MUSIC

Small World Music and their Incubator Program are excellent examples of career development support for newcomer artists. Through this program, participants are connected to senior musicians in the industry and participate in a six-to-eight-month program of mentoring and networking sessions and workshops. Where language acquisition is often a challenge for newcomers, the founder of this program said that “the advantage was speaking in music [is] because music speaks across language barriers, so you can actually communicate quite effectively. And some of the participants of our program have said how they can actually feel closer to people through musical collaboration than they are able to through [speaking] English or some other language.” A major challenge for newcomer artists is integrating their previous work into the Canadian and Toronto arts scene, and Small World Music’s program helps to bridge that gap and facilitates the networks for the artists through their career development program.

Many newcomers arrive in Canada with valuable skills acquired in their home countries but face challenges in mobilizing these skills within the Canadian job market. Arts-based projects can help recontextualize these skills in a new environment. For instance, the arts collective Waard Ward worked with a Syrian refugee family to reinterpret their traditional skills as an artistic practice. A member of the collective explains, “my collaborators are a Syrian refugee family, where the patriarch was a florist in Syria. Our collective recontextualizes his work as an artistic practice to address the barriers he faces as a newcomer and non-English speaker in finding meaningful work.” The collective also offers floristry workshops to other newcomers, teaching both floral design and social entrepreneurial skills. Over time, Waard Ward has expanded into the culinary arts, demonstrating the adaptability of arts-based programs in meeting the evolving interests and needs of newcomers.

This example illustrates how artistic initiatives can equip participants with the tools they need to explore self-employment opportunities. This can be particularly valuable for newcomers facing barriers to traditional employment due to language or credential recognition challenges.

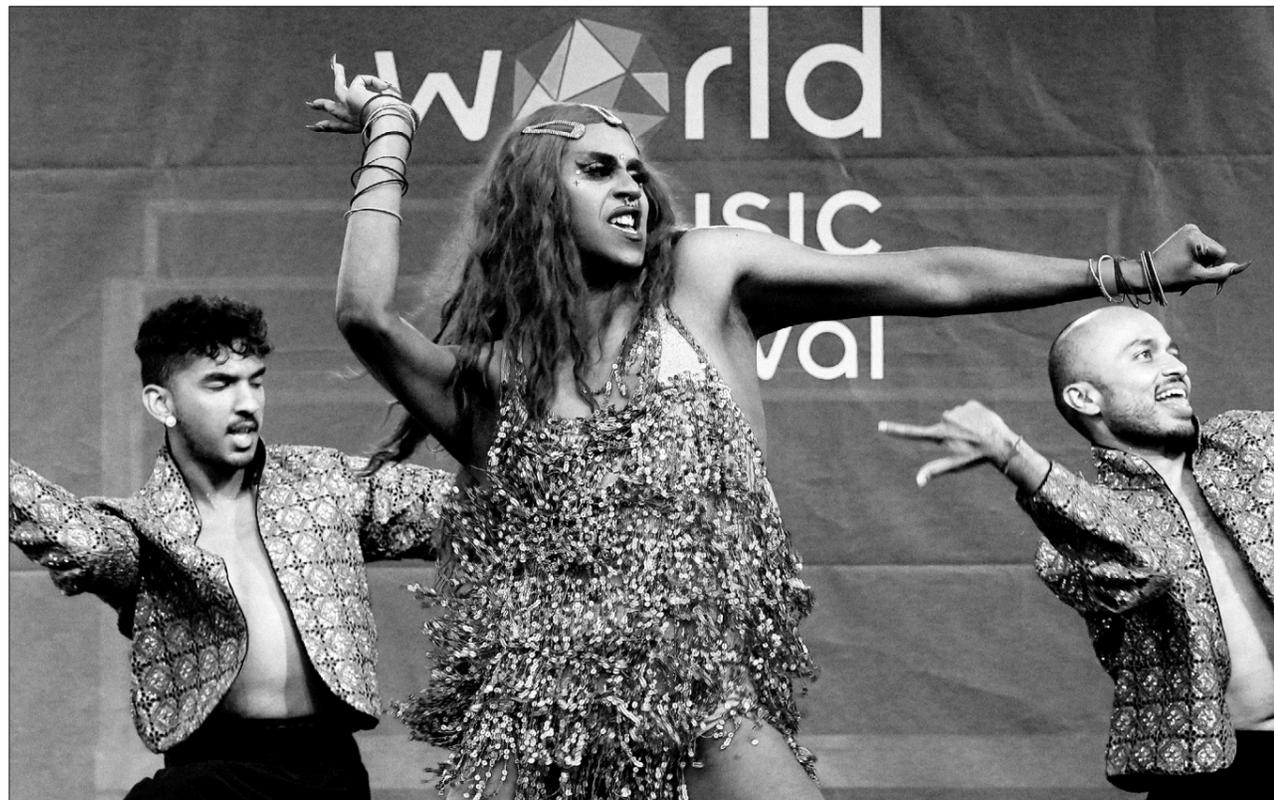


Photo by
Small World Music

Wellbeing and mental health

The multifaceted and positive effects that arts-based projects have on well-being are profound, as the arts contribute not only to immediate problem-solving but also to building confidence and empowering newcomers to become active members of society.

Arts-based initiatives can contribute in various ways to the mental health of newcomers. Many newcomers experience isolation, anxiety, and depression as they adjust to life in their new country. Arts projects offer a therapeutic outlet for these emotions, providing spaces for self-expression and community building. Creating art within one's cultural community and sharing in one's native language can smooth the transition during the early phases of settlement. Arts-based projects often employ diverse forms of expression, including improvisation, theater, dance, and storytelling.

Within immigrant communities, arts programs often target marginalized communities who are in need of emotional support. For instance, the previously mentioned Newcomers Dance Too project provided a safe space for refugee women to bond and reduce isolation. These programs helped women integrate into their new communities while feeling less judged and more accepted. Another PNR project offered Latinx newcomer/refugee trans women a platform for self-expression through digital storytelling. This initiative not only provided participants with artistic skills but also helped them recognize their potential and build confidence.

Refugee children are another newcomer group with specific needs, and the arts can serve as a valuable tool to help them adjust to their new environments. A representative from Kickstart Arts described a program for refugee youth, many of whom had little or no formal education. In collaboration with a school run by the Toronto District School Board, the program engaged students, helping them share their stories and deal with trauma. The co-founder of the Music for Hope project emphasized the role of music in helping refugee children release energy and express themselves in a safe space: "Music allowed them to stand up in a group, even when they didn't know anyone." She added that these arts programs not only benefit the participants but also provide relief for their families, who see their children overcoming traumatic memories and integrating with others. "It's very important for parents to send their kids to music or art programs because they see their children overcoming those horrible memories... it's a release for the parents too."

As a StoryCentre Canada representative highlighted, storytelling workshops often serve as therapeutic spaces where participants can share their stories on their own terms. However, ensuring the presence of social workers in some of these projects

provides additional professional support when needed. One PNR project offered newcomer youth speaking circles during the COVID-19 pandemic, where participants opened up about mental health issues. The project team reached out to public health partners to provide resources and support, demonstrating how community art organizations can collaborate with mental health professionals to meet the specific needs of newcomers.

The multifaceted and positive effects that arts-based projects have on well-being are profound, as the arts contribute not only to immediate problem-solving but also to building confidence and empowering newcomers to become active members of society. The founder of the FCJ Refugee Center emphasized the link between mental health and empowerment through art, stating, "it's not just about giving you a space where you feel safe and can start healing, but also about restoring your empowerment so that you can initiate systemic change."

2.2

Making an inclusive city through the arts

We have explored how arts-based activities contribute to settlement by helping newcomers adjust to a new place. Now, we turn our attention to the arts' role in integration, a complex process that enables newcomers to actively contribute to their new society and ensure that their contributions are recognized within the arts sector and ultimately being employed in their field. As we will see, artistic initiatives play a crucial role in enabling newcomers to become active participants and in highlighting their contributions to their local communities and Canadian society at large. Yet, the arts do not only create opportunities for meaningful encounters between people of different cultures and foster mutual learning and understanding. by providing a platform for newcomers to voice their perspectives.

FOCUS

WAARD
WARD

Through a collaboration with a Syrian florist, the contemporary arts collective Waard Ward has strengthened the sense of community and belonging in several Toronto neighbourhoods with a significant proportion of newcomers. Newcomers and refugees are not viewed as clients but as members and collaborators in the project. In Thorncliffe Park, a neighbourhood on the east side of Toronto, the collective partnered with the local mall to create a garden and installations for the community to enjoy. This initiative has created a space where residents can meet and collaborate with fellow community members through the garden and workshops.

Waard Ward moves beyond Eurocentric floristry practices by embracing decolonial approaches. For example, they feature roses as food, not just decoration, as is common in many non-Western cultures. By highlighting these practices and exploring the various uses of flowers in different cultures, the local community comes together to share experiences, cuisines, and traditions.

Photos by
Waard Ward

2.2

Long-term impact and sustained community connection and involvement with the arts is achieved when organizations collaborate with participants to create programs tailored to their creativity. This approach encourages moving beyond Eurocentric notions of the arts, allowing participants to express themselves through their own cultural lens.

Advocating for a more inclusive city

The arts can be a powerful tool for advocacy, whether mobilized by newcomers themselves or by settlement organizations working on their behalf. Artistic expression offers a way to highlight the challenges newcomers face and challenge dominant narratives that often oversimplify or misrepresent them.

Arts projects also facilitate learning for newcomers about not just their local community but the country's history. Several PNR-funded projects have focused on helping newcomers engage with Indigenous culture, with one project bringing together Indigenous and newcomer youth to explore the concept of "resilience" through art. By learning about each other's lived experiences and sharing commonalities, the youth created visual art, photography, and digital storytelling to build bridges between their communities. This intercultural exchange deepened their understanding of the strengths and challenges faced by both groups.

The integration process enabled by the arts is not solely about helping newcomers adapt; it is also about how society as a whole can better recognize and benefit from the contributions that newcomers bring. By acknowledging and valuing these contributions, we create a more welcoming environment. These encounters and reciprocal relationships foster mutual learning and understanding.

The director of Matthew House, an organization that provides services to refugees and launched an artist-in-residence program with the support of the PNR, emphasized that art can serve as a "conversation starter" within communities. She noted, "it's an opportunity to educate people through art and showcase the positive change that newcomers bring to our community and country." She recalled how a mural project at Matthew House sparked meaningful discussions with residents. People began asking questions like, "why do you have that mural? What is Matthew House? What is a refugee? Are these people legal?", which allowed them to challenge misconceptions about refugees.

Various projects have explicitly sought to give newcomers a platform to challenge negative stereotypes and reshape the narrative surrounding their communities. The director of Kickstart Arts highlighted

the importance of empowering newcomers to tell their own stories, rather than allowing others to define them: "One of our main focuses as an organization is providing access to the professional industry... newcomers are often affected by negative stereotypes about their communities, and their stories are usually told by people who don't know their experiences." This underscores the critical need for newcomers to take control of their own narratives.

One of the projects supported by the PNR provided Latinx newcomer and refugee trans women with a platform to share their stories through digital media. Participants used photography, film making, and writing to create personal narratives that were then showcased at community screenings and events. By doing so, the project challenged stereotypes and raised awareness about the unique challenges faced by trans women in the Latinx community.

Strengthening newcomer integration through arts and settlement collaboration

The insights shared by beneficiaries of the PNR offer valuable lessons for further enhancing the role of the arts in newcomer integration.

Bridging the arts and settlement sectors

The various successes of projects implemented as part of the PNR highlight the complementary roles of the settlement and arts sectors in promoting newcomer integration. The arts provide a unique space for self-expression, learning, and community building. Participants emphasized that the arts offer newcomers opportunities to reconnect with their cultural roots while simultaneously navigating and embracing their new environment.

One of the key achievements of the PNR-funded initiatives has been their ability to build bridges between the arts and settlement sectors. Arts organizations supported by the PNR have frequently developed partnerships with settlement agencies for outreach and collaboration, allowing them to tailor their offerings more effectively to the needs of newcomers.

However, while these collaborations have proven effective, there is a need for further mutual learning between the arts and settlement sectors. Both sectors can benefit from a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities each faces in serving newcomers. Arts organizations must gain a clearer understanding of the unique pressures facing settlement agencies, particularly in dealing with the immediate and practical needs of newcomers. Conversely, settlement organizations should be made more aware of the powerful role that the arts can play in integration, not only as a tool for emotional expression and healing but also as a means of fostering community connections and economic empowerment.

Building long-term sustainability in arts funding for newcomers

Focus group participants highlighted the importance of stable funding to ensure the long-term impact of arts-based programs for newcomers. They expressed the need for long term support, resources and networks beyond the timeframe of the grant. While short-term funding allows for experimentation and innovation, it often limits the sustainability of successful initiatives. One of the recurring themes in the focus group discussions was the precarious nature of funding for arts-based initiatives. Participants noted that while short-term grants enable them to launch projects, sustaining these initiatives over the long term is a significant challenge. This lack of stable funding restricts the depth and impact of the work, as organizations must constantly reapply for grants and adjust their activities based on available resources.

One PNR beneficiary shared that “it’s super precarious and really difficult, and most of my energy goes into grant writing.” Another added, “it’s heartbreaking when we have to tell people, ‘We don’t have the funds to continue something you’ve come

to depend on!” A third participant highlighted the value of multi-year funding, stating that “multi-year funding is great because it allows us to really sink our teeth into projects.”

The director of Kickstart Arts emphasized that the most impactful arts programs are those sustained over time, allowing for deep and meaningful relationships to develop. Short-term project funding often fails to capture the long-term benefits of arts programming, such as nurturing a newcomer who eventually becomes a community leader. As the director noted, “it’s invaluable for a young person who starts with us at 15 and is now working with us at 25.” Programs like IRCC’s five-year funding model have shown promise in providing the stability needed for such long-term impacts. A representative from Mabelle Arts, who received this type of funding to develop a newcomer artist training program in community arts facilitation, explained, “we didn’t realize until a few years into the program just how impactful it would be over time.”

Newcomer artists: Catalysts for integration through the arts

Newcomer artists are a vital resource in harnessing the arts for integration. Their lived experiences and cultural perspectives not only enrich the creative landscape but also provide unique insights into the challenges faced by their communities. However, these artists often encounter significant barriers to entering the arts sector, such as language challenges, limited networks, and restricted access to resources.

A representative from Unisphere Canada emphasized the importance of empowering newcomers: “We identify this capacity and train them. Then they become mentors to teach other newcomers, which is even more effective.” Programs like Mabelle ARTS’ Newcomer Artists Training Program in Community Arts Facilitation are designed to support newcomer artists as they integrate into Toronto’s art sector by offering them placements, assisting them with grant writing, and providing one-on-one job counseling.

This not only opens up new professional opportunities but also enables them to contribute to their communities. As the director of the Arab Community Centre of Toronto (ACCT) points out: “Having an artist who understands the culture and background of our community, and who utilizes cultural elements, makes the programming more meaningful!”

Considering a holistic approach to settlement, with a focus on skills acquisition and pathways to employment while considering the mental health and wellbeing of newcomer artists, the end of this section will offer some recommendations to arts funders. The gap between the arts and settlement sector can be bridged by increasing visibility within artist communities and advocating for a more inclusive city.

— THE MOST IMPACTFUL ARTS PROGRAMS ARE THOSE SUSTAINED OVER TIME, ALLOWING FOR DEEP AND MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS TO DEVELOP.

RECOMMEN- DATIONS

2 Create sustainable and flexible funding models

MULTI-YEAR FUNDING
Funders should prioritize multi-year grants that allow organizations to plan long-term strategies and respond effectively to evolving needs, ensuring programs have sufficient time to develop and grow.

EVALUATION AND IMPACT MEASUREMENT
Support ongoing evaluation mechanisms to assess the long-term impact of arts-based programs for newcomers. Comparative evaluations of outcomes across various sectors (arts, settlement, health) could help highlight best practices and improve program effectiveness.

DEVELOP LONG-TERM PARTNERSHIPS
Encourage cross-sectoral funding streams that allow settlement, education, and arts ministries to jointly fund projects. This will create stability and promote initiatives that bridge sectors, ensuring both short- and long-term success.

1 Strengthen collaboration between arts and settlement organizations.

ENCOURAGE CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION
Funding bodies should allocate dedicated grants that incentivize partnerships between arts organizations and settlement agencies, ensuring that the arts are integrated into settlement programming and vice versa.

DEVELOP CO-LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES
Organize conferences, workshops, or forums that bring together stakeholders from both sectors to discuss promising practices and strategies for further collaboration. A national conference could bring together arts funders, settlement organizations, and artists to share insights and solutions.

SUPPORT CAPACITY-BUILDING
Provide training and resources for both sectors to understand each other's practices and mandates. This will help arts organizations develop culturally appropriate programming and settlement agencies harness the power of the arts in their work with newcomers.

3 Promote research and knowledge sharing to enhance newcomer integration through the arts

SUPPORT COMPARATIVE RESEARCH
Encourage studies that evaluate the outcomes of different arts-based programs for newcomers across various regions, identifying the most effective approaches.

CREATE PLATFORMS FOR KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE
Facilitate ongoing dialogue between researchers, arts organizations, and settlement agencies to share data, case studies, and best practices. A national online platform or resource hub could house these insights and serve as a resource for all stakeholders.

3

Newcomer artists are not a homogeneous group, which presents a key challenge when designing policies that effectively address the problems and obstacles they face. Before examining these challenges and potential solutions, it is essential to understand the diversity among newcomer artists. There is significant variation in their countries of origin, pathways to Canada, and reasons driving migration. There is also great differences in the artistic disciplines in which artists practice and their respective career stages. These five aspects—origins, routes, motivations, disciplines, and career stages influence the types of challenges they encounter. It is crucial to keep this in mind as we discuss their challenges and obstacles and strategies for dismantling barriers.

Our discussion of the challenges faced by newcomer artists draws upon focus group and roundtable discussions with recipients of the Newcomers and Refugees Grant. Consequently, our focus is on individuals privileged enough to have benefited from this selective grant—a limitation of our sample, as many less fortunate newcomer artists also have challenges to share. We also draw upon the reports and application documents submitted by these artists, which include questions about the problems they face and how the grant has helped them in overcoming these challenges.

While the responses that the recipients of the TAC Newcomer and refugee grants contained numerous useful insights, we should note that the way the questions were formulated has probably influenced the nature of their response. In particular, applicants were asked to answer the following group of questions: “Describe any successes and challenges you have experienced as an artist in Toronto.

How will this mentorship address these challenges? How will it support your development as an artist? How do you think it will support your integration into Toronto?” The grouping of these different questions may have guided participants to focus specifically on challenges related to their artistic careers rather than broader issues they might face as newcomers.

In this section, we will discuss four key elements before concluding with recommendations to make the arts sector more inclusive for newcomer artists. First, we discuss challenges newcomer artists face, stemming both from their newcomer status and the inherent difficulties of creative professions. These challenges include practical and material issues such as housing, access to resources, and financial precarity. They also encompass symbolic challenges like feelings of downward mobility, injustice, and frustration from being unable to realize their vocation, which can lead to mental health concerns, increased precarity, and misalignment between a newcomers’ skills and available employment. Secondly, we address the multiple barriers that prevent a smooth integration of newcomer artists in Toronto. These obstacles include various forms of discrimination and a lack of recognition of newcomer artists’ value. Thirdly, we explore how, within this context of constraints, newcomer artists navigate the Toronto arts scene and find opportunities to advance their careers. Finally, we discuss support mechanisms designed to help newcomer artists overcome these challenges. In particular, we examine grants and mentorship programs and their contributions to advancing the careers of newcomer artists. Drawing on these analyses, we offer insights into how the arts community can become more inclusive and supportive towards newcomer artists.

EMPOWERING NEWCOMER ARTISTS

3.1

The multifaceted challenges facing newcomer artists

Newcomer artists face a complex array of challenges upon their arrival in Canada, encompassing traditional settlement issues and specific obstacles within the arts sector. They must adjust to a new country, contending with practical and material constraints typical of newcomers, while also navigating the particularly challenging nature of the arts industry.

Like many newcomers, these artists must navigate unfamiliar systems, overcome language barriers, and understand their rights as tenants and workers. To achieve economic stability amid rising living costs (especially in Toronto), many take on odd jobs outside their field, which leaves them with little time or energy to devote to their art. Language barriers further complicate accessibility and integration into community, from searching for affordable and adequate housing to connecting with potential employers. Housing is a significant concern, especially for those wishing to start a family. For example, Farah³ recounted how she and her family lived with friends for nine months, then moved into a basement apartment, and eventually, they had to move far from Toronto because of affordability issues and the need for space for their new baby. She noted, “we couldn’t live in a basement anymore.”

Employment precarity often hinders newcomer artists from pursuing their artistic ambitions. A theatre artist from India, Arjun, explained that working multiple jobs to pay the bills left him with no time to integrate socially or professionally with other artists, making it difficult to establish roots in Toronto: “My life in Toronto has involved working all weekdays and often night shifts and some weekends as well.” Divya, an Indian author, echoed these sentiments: “When you are focused on just meeting the basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter, you can’t possibly entertain the idea of trying to refine your art, because you don’t even know whether you’re going to stay alive.”

The precarity faced by newcomer artists is perplexing, especially given their high qualifications that one would assume could secure them well-paying jobs. This situation highlights a key issue within Canada’s high-skilled immigration system: many newcomers find that Canadian employers do not recognize the value of their qualifications and experience. As a result, even artists with additional credentials are excluded from high-skilled employment opportunities. For example, Minh, a Vietnamese performer, held an MBA that helped him obtain permanent residency. However, he discovered that his qualifications did not lead to job offers in his field. “I tried to apply for jobs with my qualifications, but I never got any response,” he explained. Consequently, he began working as a Vietnamese interpreter as he is bilingual and there is demand for translators. This job became his “financial anchor” as he endeavored to break into the musical theatre industry, yet Minh continued to juggle performances, personal projects, and his interpreter work. He expressed doubts to us about sustaining his career objectives in the long term, reflecting that “the challenge for me, ongoing for the past four years, is the sustainability of my career as a performer and creator. How far or until when can I keep going?” Although arts councils have been supportive, he noted that grants “can only open doors,” emphasizing that created work should be commercially viable to sustain itself. His precarity was then further intensified when

³All the names used in the report are pseudonyms

PARTICIPANTS IN OUR FOCUS GROUPS EXPRESSED FRUSTRATION THAT, DESPITE HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR A MULTICULTURAL CITY LIKE TORONTO, MANY DOORS SEEMED CLOSED UPON THEIR ARRIVAL. THEY FELT A SENSE OF FALSE PROMISE FROM IMMIGRATION PROGRAMS THAT SIGNALLED INTEREST IN THEIR SKILLS BUT DID NOT TRANSLATE INTO RECOGNITION WITHIN THE LABOUR MARKET.

he was laid off from his interpreter job during the economic downturn that occurred during the Covid pandemic. Faced with uncertainty, he wondered, “what is next? Who am I? What is my identity? What do I do?” Minh’s experience illustrates the broader challenges newcomer artists face: despite their qualifications and dedication, they often struggle to find stable employment that allows them to pursue their artistic passions.

Participants in our focus groups expressed frustration that, despite high expectations for a multicultural city like Toronto, many doors seemed closed upon their arrival. They felt a sense of false promise from immigration programs that signaled interest in their skills but did not translate into recognition within the labour market. For example, Farah, an established visual artist from Tehran, experienced stark downward social mobility after moving to Canada. In her home country, she managed a large artist studio equipped for significant projects and received commissions regularly. She was deeply involved in non profit work, teaching marginalized groups, and worked full-time for a renowned organization, eventually becoming a manager overseeing pottery teachers. She and her husband chose Canada over Australia because of an open immigration program for artists under the skilled workers category. They applied as college-level teachers, showcasing their extensive work experience. However, upon settling in Canada, she was disappointed to discover a significant gap between the immigration program’s promises and the reality of societal acceptance and employability within the labour market. “We expected to be accepted as experienced people because the program was called ‘skilled workers’. But we found

out that between the immigration and the actual society, there is a big gap,” she explained. Similarly, Amina, who held a prestigious position as the head of permanent exhibitions at a prominent institution in Egypt, faced a lack of recognition in Canada. Despite being the youngest manager in her institution at age 25, she found that “nothing really of what you have done before, no matter how prestigious it was, makes sense here.” She questioned, “Why did I give up all of this privilege that I had back home to have to start from scratch?”

In addition to the difficulties in establishing livelihoods and having their competencies recognized, many newcomer artists deal with mental health and emotional issues. Some of these challenges stem from external factors, such as traumatic experiences prior to their arrival, which can persist after resettlement. Additionally, the lack of recognition and inability to practice their vocation in their new environment can add new layers of trauma or lead to depression among those who previously did not have mental health concerns.

Many refugee artists have had to cope with various traumas. For example, Nadir, a theatre artist from Iraq described the shock of being forced to leave his home country and the sense of limitation he felt: “I experienced a sense of confinement and a feeling of complete darkness, thinking only about the past, until I decided to face the new reality.” Similarly, Lina, a visual artist from Eritrea expressed how living under the shadow of dictatorship in their homeland continued to affect their mental state even after moving to Canada: “I always say I am living under the shadow of the dictator. He knows everything about me.” Navid, an Iranian rapper and LGBTQ+ activist faced profound loneliness: “I almost gave up on

music because of being so lonely.” Having fled Iran due to persecution, this artist struggled with mental health issues in Toronto. The challenges of adjusting to a new environment and dealing with past trauma took a toll on their well-being, nearly causing them to abandon their music career due to feelings of isolation and despair.

The instability all-too-common to a career as an artist in Canada can generate mental health issues even for those without prior trauma. Neda, an Iranian visual artist, explains: “You have to be strong... we artists want to always be creating, and if we stop creating, we will definitely feel depressed.” Camila, a multidisciplinary artist from Peru suffered emotionally from the lack of recognition that she experienced in Canada: “When I came to Canada, it definitely destabilized me emotionally. The downward mobility became something that was really heavy for me to manage emotionally. I didn’t feel ready to integrate into the community as my previous work.”

The experiences shared by newcomer artists highlight the multifaceted and interconnected challenges they face, including economic instability, lack of recognition, and mental health struggles. Although many of the focus group participants were highly trained in the arts and held prestigious positions in their countries of origin, their skills were often not recognized upon their arrival in Canada. As a result, many were unable to rely solely on their artistic practices for financial support and had to take jobs outside their areas of expertise to meet basic needs. These challenges stem from multiple systemic barriers that hinder their full integration into Canada’s arts and labor markets.

Obstacles on the way to newcomer artists' success

Limits of settlement services for artists

A significant issue among organizations involved in newcomer settlement is the lack of specific knowledge and adaptation to the unique situations of newcomer artists. The widespread emphasis among employers on the need for Canadian credentials or Canadian experience constitutes a significant barrier, and is part of a broader problem of discrimination against artists from the 'Global South'.

The disconnect between settlement services and the specific needs of artists has been highlighted by those who have interacted with these organizations. Newcomer artists often find themselves attending general orientation sessions focused on mainstream employment sectors, with little to no information about accessing opportunities within the arts sector. The settlement sector frequently lacks the ability to provide information, counseling, or support tailored to creative professions.

Upon arriving in Toronto, Amina, a curator with ten years of experience was directed to the YMCA for an integration session. She was told, "sorry, I cannot help you. The only way for you is to either go for a degree at any Canadian university or volunteer at a museum or gallery." Unaware of organizations like Toronto Arts Council, she spent her first six months jobless, volunteering at galleries. With a child to support, she had to compromise and accept any job available, eventually working as a gallery attendant just to make ends meet.

As Isabella explains: "When I arrived, I missed somebody who introduced me to the grants." She further notes that settlement services can discourage artists from pursuing their vocations: "[Settlement officers] try to convince you to go to 'real work'... because you are an immigrant, you have to go to a clinic to do service or do home service: you cannot pursue your artist career because that's a dream."

These comments reflect a larger problem with the provision of employment services to highly skilled newcomers, which has been the subject of extensive research. During our project, we engaged with musicologist Caroline Marcoux-Gendron, who conducted research on immigrant musicians in Quebec (Marcoux-Gendron, 2015; Marcoux-Gendron & Champagne, 2022). She shared insights about the lack of tailored support from settlement services. She also noted that many musicians she interviewed did not even disclose their actual profession as musicians, anticipating they would not receive help in that field.

3.2

Discrimination and racism

Discrimination, both subtle and overt, is a significant obstacle that newcomer artists face. Manifesting in various forms and often difficult to pinpoint, these discriminatory barriers become evident through the testimonies collected during our focus groups and roundtable discussions.

Many newcomer artists highlight the prevalence of linguistic discrimination—the unfair treatment of individuals based on their speech characteristics, such as accent or perceived vocabulary sophistication. For instance, Farah noted: “There are not many people speaking with accents in organizations, you know what I mean? So, yes, they hire artists of colour, or admins of colour, but usually Canadian-born, Canadian-raised. So it’s very challenging for newcomers.” Similarly, Minh shared how linguistic discrimination hinders his progress: “In terms of booking established productions, I have an agent who’s getting me out there to audition. But I noticed that even though I was trained in New York, I haven’t been able to book any established musicals in Toronto. I’ve been booking more singing projects—projects that require singing only and

not speaking. So I think maybe it’s my accent.” Ahsan, a highly experienced theatre artist from Bangladesh further illustrates this problem. With over 26 years of professional experience and more than 500 performances in his home country, he found himself isolated from the English-speaking theatre scene upon arriving in Toronto. He became actively engaged in the Bangladeshi community, co-founding a Theatre and producing plays in Bengali. However, he felt “completely isolated from the English theatre scene in Toronto.”

Linguistic discrimination is often compounded by other forms of discrimination, such as racial bias. As Minh suggests: “With somebody who looks like me to work in established productions, there seem to be stereotypes. Like, I have to be dancing really well to be one of the dancing guys at the back for someone who looks like me.” These experiences underscore the multifaceted nature of discrimination that newcomer artists face, highlighting the need for systemic changes to create a more inclusive arts community.

Western-centrism and ‘Canadian experience’

The arts have played a significant role in nation-building in Canada. When the Massey Commission, formally known as the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences, was established in 1951, Western centric and Eurocentric notions of arts and culture were solidified on a national level. Their mandate referenced the need to preserve Canadian culture, and specifically English and French heritage. The Canada Council for the Arts was established through the Commission, which then defined what would be considered “good” art. In this case, “good” art referred to arts and culture produced with a Eurocentric focus. Until today, as the artistic director of Jumblies Theatre pointed out, the Toronto arts scene remains largely Eurocentric, which

puts artists trained in non-Western traditions at a disadvantage. A program manager at the Cultural Pluralism in the Arts Movement Ontario highlighted the inequitable division of funding, with Eurocentric institutions often receiving the lion’s share of resources. This leaves newcomer artists and smaller organizations underfunded and struggling to survive. Many participants in our focus groups, who migrated from Global South countries, felt that certain art practices are not recognized in Canada. For example, Farah, an Iranian visual artist specializing in ceramic murals, found that her art form is uncommon in Canada, limiting her opportunities. She shared:

“One of my practices was ceramic murals, which you can find a few of them in Canada. But it was a big deal back home. But because there is no opportunity here, I just gave up on that practice... I remember I applied to a visual art grant for the [Ontario Arts Council] and I had a conversation with a program officer. She was like, ‘Really, you could do this? How does that work?’ Because they didn’t know of this practice, right? Even the jury didn’t know the practice.”

3.2

Additionally, there is often an expectation that artists from specific countries will produce art reflecting their culture (Newman et al. 2023). However, not all newcomer artists want to be confined to their ethnic group or certain forms of art. Amina, a curator from Egypt, confronted this assumption:

“There is the expectation that if you’re a curator coming from Egypt, then you will be focused on Middle Eastern, maybe ancient Egyptian stuff, or mostly Middle Eastern contemporary art. I remember when I was doing my degree at U of T, there was a TA position for art history, and someone asked me, ‘Oh, you applied for that? Are you familiar with Western art history?’ And I was like, ‘Yeah, that’s actually what I studied in my undergrad. I did study from pre-ancient civilizations until contemporary art, and it was all Western—we were studying from American books.’ But there’s this expectation that because you come from this country, you’re not familiar with international and Western art.”

These assumptions have consequences beyond aesthetics; they affect access to the labour market. Amina explained: “If an art gallery approaches me to curate a project about immigrant artists based in Toronto, they think I have the knowledge. But if I apply for a job at that same institution, I won’t get it because I don’t have the ‘Canadian experience’ to be there. There’s also the fear that if I get in, I’m going to change it and focus only on North African or West Asian art.” This suggests that institutions are willing to employ newcomer artists on a project basis for specialized community projects but are reluctant to include them or offer permanent positions.

A significant obstacle that newcomer artists face is the widespread expectation that they must rely on their own community networks to succeed. Several participants in our focus groups challenged this notion, arguing that it places undue pressure on communities that may lack the resources or influence to provide meaningful support. For instance, Farah expressed frustration with this expectation: “I’ve heard that a lot: ‘Go back to your community. They will help you.’ No, my community is not dominant here. They don’t have access to many things. They are people like me.”

A significant barrier that newcomer artists face is the devaluation of their backgrounds when they come from the Global South. Due to widespread Western centrism in the art scene, qualifications and experiences from these countries are often considered less valuable. Camila articulates this challenge: “Coming from Global South countries to a country of the Global North, your credentials—cultural, academic, professional—are not valued the same as Global North countries. It might be different if you come from Italy, France, or Germany with a graduate degree or artistic practices that have the

same Western concepts as in Canada. But if you come from the Global South with those credentials, they’re not taken.” She recounts her experience of not being accepted for jobs despite her decade of experience: “I applied to different organizations within the arts, especially those focused on education or with a social or pedagogical artistic office. And though I had 10 years of experience, I was competing within a system where perhaps my language or my experience was not recognized the same.”

Similarly, Iranian photographer Ali illustrates the elusive “Canadian experience” obstacle. Despite his efforts to conform to local standards, he found it impossible to overcome this barrier. He shares:

“For the first couple of years, I tried to introduce myself properly, adjusting my resume and CV as they wanted. It took time to learn how to write my bio, how to introduce myself as they want to see me. Then I was told, ‘Your resume is good, your bio is good, your experience is good. However, we need Canadian experience. Start from scratch. Maybe get a Canadian certificate because your graduation wasn’t here.’ So I went back to school for two years to get a Canadian Certificate in Project Management. After that, I had everything. I started submitting applications, had one interview, two interviews, three interviews, four interviews. At the end of every single interview, I was told: ‘Everything is good. You have a Canadian certificate, a good resume. But you don’t have Canadian experience.’ That was when I realized the issue of Canadian experience. I asked, ‘How can I get Canadian experience when nobody wants to trust me?’”

These testimonies highlight systemic barriers that devalue the skills and experiences of newcomer artists from the Global South.

Administrative exclusions

Another significant obstacle that newcomer artists face is ineligibility for public arts funding due to their immigration status or place of residence. Artists who are temporary residents or live outside of the Toronto municipal boundaries often find themselves excluded from funding opportunities. In our roundtable discussion, a British visual artist expressed difficulties in finding suitable spaces for her artistic growth, particularly because her status as a temporary immigrant disqualifies her from accessing public arts funding. Similarly, Santiago, a Colombian musician working in film, recounted how not holding permanent resident status impacted his early career in Canada. He shared:

“ I was ghosted and removed from the film because it’s a breach of contract. My name had to be taken off. I got paid, but my credit was removed. It would have been great to start off my career in Canada with a movie like that. I had the capacity to do the artistic work, but I was being held back by my papers, which was really infuriating.”

Geographical location also presents accessibility challenges. Many immigrants and newcomers reside outside of Toronto proper, in places like Brampton and Mississauga. However, artists living in these areas can be excluded from Toronto arts funding due to residency requirements for receiving funding. These forms of exclusion prevent talented artists from accessing the resources they need to develop their skills and advance their careers.

The rationale behind this exclusion is that TAC’s funding comes from Toronto residents’ tax dollars, and therefore the logic follows that artists not living in Toronto should be ineligible. However, a large number of immigrants living in the Greater Toronto Area, but outside Toronto’s municipal boundaries, actively contribute to the city’s arts scene. TAC funding is intended to support Torontonians’ experiences with art within the city. From this perspective, if an artist from outside Toronto exhibits their work in the city, they should be considered eligible, much like an organization that uses TAC funding to bring in an artist from outside Toronto.

Curtailed artistic freedom

Despite Canada’s reputation for freedom of expression, some artists find their ability to address issues from their home countries limited, affecting both their creative work and their sense of integration into the local arts scene. For instance, Farah, an Iranian visual artist, faced challenges when attempting to exhibit politically charged work. Her art often addresses political situations in Iran, but she discovered that even in Canada, showcasing such pieces could be problematic. During her first solo exhibition at a publicly funded gallery outside Toronto, she was told that a specific work was “too political” to display. Feeling censored, she challenged the decision by requesting a written explanation for the refusal. The gallery hesitated to provide one, and ultimately, she was allowed to exhibit the piece. She recounted another experience at a major art event in Toronto: “I showed my political work at a very large institute in Nuit Blanche, and I had—not that you cannot show that work—but it was like, ‘Be careful’ kind of comment.” These cautionary advisories made her question the freedom she expected to find: “I immigrated to Canada, to a free country. But again, I struggle with showing my work because it’s political, because it’s about women of Iran.” Her frustration grew when she and a colleague sought to create murals supporting the Woman Life Freedom movement in 2022. Despite approaching multiple organizations they had previously worked with, they faced rejections for various reasons, such as the issue being considered “too regional.” She pointed out that cities worldwide—Paris, Berlin, Milan—were hosting similar murals. “There’s a large community here,” she

emphasized, noting that a gathering in Richmond Hill drew 50,000 Iranian people.

Similarly, Camila, a Peruvian multidisciplinary artist, became hesitant to continue her political activism after moving to Canada. In Peru, she had been deeply involved in grassroots movements, working with land defenders and anti-mining organizations through arts and documentary photography to raise awareness. However, upon relocating, she faced a complex situation: “Coming to a country like Canada—a settler colonial country and an empire country—and bringing your political views, especially with Canada being one of the countries in the world with more mining corporations in the Global South, made me hesitant ... I was advised to be careful of certain discourses and activities that I could get involved in.” This caution led her to refrain from engaging in the same level of activism she had pursued in Peru.

The challenges faced by newcomer artists arise from various forms of discrimination and exclusion, creating significant barriers to their full integration into the Canadian arts landscape. These obstacles limit not only their ability to express their creative potential but also their opportunities for professional growth. To build a genuinely inclusive arts scene that fully supports newcomer artists, substantial changes are required.

Newcomer artists navigating the Toronto arts scene

Despite the numerous challenges and obstacles discussed thus far, many newcomer artists have found ways to advance their careers in the Toronto arts scene. Their journeys not only highlight the barriers they face but also showcase their resilience and dedication to their art.

A common strategy among these artists is coping with precarity by combining multiple sources of income, sometimes including work outside the arts sector. Samir, for instance, balanced part-time jobs in restaurants during his first two years in Canada to sustain himself financially while pursuing his music career. He explained: “I kept it always part-time; I didn’t do it full-time because I wanted to focus also on my music. So I was borrowing time just to make some kind of surviving money, so I could pay my rent and stuff like this. At the same time, in my free time, I was trying to build my career here—building my connections, meeting people, learning about the art councils, the funding system, sponsorships, managing to get some gigs, creating small projects to do some shows.”

Through this approach, Samir built a community and network within the local scene while maintaining financial stability. Similarly, Santiago, a musician from Colombia, emphasizes the importance of combining different activities to sustain himself: “I’ve partitioned myself into arts projects intended to generate wealth, which is the film industry, and then there’s artistically driven projects and academia ... Everything has to come together to make the bigger pie work.”

Multidisciplinary artist and illustrator Camila explained that she had to adapt her artistic practices in order to navigate the local art economy. First, understanding how to frame her practice within the Canadian context was crucial. She realized that appropriately naming her work opened doors to new opportunities: “In Peru, I would just say, ‘I work with communities through creative

methods.’ Here, that became: ‘I’m a community artist’ or ‘I’m an artist educator.’ Once I understood that practices had names beyond being a painter or a multidisciplinary artist, I was able to engage with a wider range of opportunities. There were grants specifically for community arts.”

In addition, in her illustration practice, Camila adapted her artistic style to appeal to local tastes. This decision proved to be another important step in her career: “Translating the style that I had into Canadian audiences was also a practice—recognizing that the aesthetic I bring from home doesn’t need to be scratched but needs to be altered and targeted to appeal to a more... Western standard of arts.”

These stories illustrate how, despite significant barriers, newcomer artists demonstrate resilience and adaptability. By diversifying their income sources, building networks, and tailoring their practices to the local context, they find ways to progress in the Toronto arts scene.

Some newcomer artists responded to the systemic barriers they faced in the labour market by transforming themselves into cultural and social entrepreneurs. For example, Samir, a musician with 15 years of teaching experience, faced discrimination when seeking employment at music schools in Canada. He explains: “When I came to Canada, I tried to work with music schools. Until now, I couldn’t work with any because they need something called Canadian experience, which I don’t have. That was the main reason I couldn’t be hired by music schools. Most of them interviewed me and said, ‘You don’t know how to teach a Canadian kid.’ After two to three years, I stopped speaking with the music schools and started doing my own private lessons.”

By offering private lessons, Samir bypassed institutional barriers and continued his vocation independently. His experience illustrates how newcomer artists often have to create their own opportunities when existing systems exclude them.

Other newcomer artists launched non-for-profit initiatives, like Farah, who recognized the lack of support for newcomer artists and decided to address this gap. She recalls:

“About ten years ago, there were bridging programs for many occupations like physicians and accountants, but nothing for artists or art workers. Based on my experience back home, we registered a non-profit organization focused on supporting peer newcomer artists after two or three years in Canada.

In 2016, we established [our organization]. I started discussing this challenge with local art organizations such as North York Arts, Neighbourhood Arts Network, and others. They were good allies, and we were lucky to get some funding from the Ontario Arts Council, the city, and different funding bodies.”

With this organization, she facilitated several series of workshops tailored for newcomer artists, called “New Canadians in the Arts.” She explains:

“I hired facilitators through the network I had built, and we had good participation. I was able to make a good network with peer newcomer artists and art workers. We continued until COVID. Before COVID, the change of the Ontario government led to funding cuts for the arts, and then COVID hit. We stopped working basically. We had one completely online project funded by the Ontario Arts Council, which was very successful with ten series of workshops. But then we stopped because we couldn’t get sufficient support—it was just me, my board, and sometimes my husband, because at that time, he had to work full time.”

This story highlights not only the capacity of newcomer artists to take matters into their own hands but also the systemic limitations they face. Despite their efforts and the value of their initiatives, lack of sustained support and funding can hinder the long-term viability of such organizations.

Throughout our discussions, we encountered many newcomer artists who, despite being experts and experienced in their fields, chose to invest in further education or engage in volunteer work to overcome the obstacles they faced. By enhancing their social and cultural capital, they aimed to better integrate into the Toronto arts scene and advance their careers. While this strategy often yields positive results, it is important to acknowledge that not all artists have the financial means or time to pursue additional studies or unpaid work.

The experiences of these newcomer artists demonstrate not only the resilience and adaptability they have shown in navigating the Toronto arts scene but also the persistent barriers that continue to limit their opportunities. Whether through developing entrepreneurial ventures, adapting artistic practices, or launching community initiatives, these artists have found creative ways to push forward. However, their stories also highlight the pressing need for more structural support to ensure their long-term success.

3.4

Support mechanisms for newcomer artists

Newcomer artists face a range of challenges that require both financial and professional support to navigate the Toronto arts scene effectively. Among the available support mechanisms, Toronto Arts Council's Artist Mentorship Grant plays a notable role in addressing both of these dimensions. It offers a combination of financial support and professional guidance, helping artists develop their careers while building connections in the local arts ecosystem. While this study focuses primarily on grants and mentorship, it is important to acknowledge that many other tools and programs exist that also play a significant role in supporting newcomer artists.

Grants

Grants serve not only as financial support but also carry significant non-economic benefits. They provide validation, open doors to new opportunities, and can mark turning points in an artist's career. Isabella, a multidisciplinary artist from Cuba, described how receiving even a micro-grant had a profound impact on her journey: "When I received my first grant, a micro-grant of \$1,000, it felt like a million dollars. It was my open door to start connecting and seeing how many opportunities there are. With this grant, I began to improve my English, volunteer, and use art to connect with the community. It was life-changing."

Grants can also enhance an artist's credibility within the community. Natalia, a visual artist from Uzbekistan who lived in several countries before settling in Canada, emphasized how grants contributed to her professional recognition: "If I go somewhere where nobody knows me, no one would just hand me work. But because of grants—which are more accessible and objective if you can prove your capability—I could establish myself."

Grants can also enable long-term investments that yield substantial career growth. Samir utilized a grant to fund his first album, a project that had been a long-standing aspiration. The grant allowed him to focus on his music and collaborate with other musicians to create arrangements. The album marked a major step forward in his professional growth, allowing him to get public and media exposure, as well as performance opportunities.

Similarly, Rajesh, an actor and director from Mumbai, identified TAC's Newcomers and Refugees Grant as a turning point:

"I was an, actor, director, stage manager, sound designer in Mumbai, India for almost 10 years. When I came to come to Canada, I felt like take a leap of faith and see what happens. [I struggled] for the first six years where whoever I connected with just did not lead to anything ... Nothing concrete happened until I got this grant. It allowed me to take time away from work, focus fully on integrating, and connect with more people. Eight years later, I'm running a theatre company. The grant really helped me. It got me my first steps."

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For many artists, grants provide the necessary time and resources to focus their time and energy on their creative endeavors, enabling a shift toward economically sustainable artistic practices. Yet, despite their benefits, grants also present certain limitations. One significant barrier is language. Artists who speak English as a second language often struggle with language specific to grants and the style required for applications. Isabella highlighted this challenge: "The language barrier can make writing grants very tough. When I started, it was hard to write my own bio and artist statements. Now, many funders offer workshops to teach you how to apply, but it's still a challenge." Natalia echoed this sentiment: "Not all artists are administrators, and they may not have the capacity or language skills to write a perfect grant."

Additionally, many grants do not support artists' livelihoods directly, focusing instead on project-based

funding. This approach does not address the pressing issue of living expenses in a city with a high cost of living like Toronto. Samir explained: "Most of the funds you can get are not for you; they're for your project. You spend the money on your project, but you still need to live: to pay rent, eat, pay bills."

Grants provide newcomer artists with essential financial support and open doors to networks, recognition, and opportunities that help advance their careers. Beyond the monetary value, they offer validation and can mark significant turning points in an artist's journey, as seen in the experiences shared. However, challenges such as language barriers and the focus on project-based funding highlight the complexities of navigating grant systems. Despite these hurdles, many newcomer artists find that grants play a crucial role in helping them gain a foothold in the arts scene and pursue their creative ambitions.

Mentorship

Mentorship programs play a key role in helping newcomer artists navigate the complexities of the Toronto arts scene. TAC's Newcomer and Refugee Artist Mentorship Grant was established to facilitate this integration by pairing newcomer artists with experienced local mentors. Neda, a multidisciplinary artist who moved to Canada in 2012, shared her perspective as both a mentee and a mentor within the program. Reflecting on her initial experiences, she noted: "When I came to Canada, I knew no one—it was a little bit scary. Everything was so vague to me, so I started making connections." Neda found her mentor through social media, and their collaboration helped her understand the nuances of the North American market, particularly in children's book illustration:

"He helped me... because he connected me to publishers and also how the North American culture is actually communicating with its audience. It was very important to me because I had to do a lot of research to know the audience for children's books in Canada. We did that successfully, and I was connected to the publisher, and my book was published."

Later on, Neda became a mentor herself, and emphasized the reciprocal nature of the mentorship relationship: "All these mentees are professional artists in their own countries, so it's not like they are just students." She highlighted the importance of cultural proximity in building effective mentorships: "I'm an Iranian artist, and I was matched with an Iranian mentee as well. We worked on a pop-up book, and she made a dummy of the book; it turned out really well. She also participated in illustration conferences, became a member of the illustration society in Canada, and gained confidence."

Divya, an Indian author, also underscored the significance of the program's matching component:

"The beautiful thing about TAC's program is they already have a database of mentors and their specialties. I'm someone from the Indian subcontinent, and I was matched with a person also from the Indian subcontinent who happened to write on very similar themes that I was interested in. I was pursuing a short story collection, and this mentor had written about ten books rooted very much in the Indian subcontinent."

— MENTORSHIP IS NOT JUST ABOUT MAKING INTRODUCTIONS; IT INVOLVES CULTIVATING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE MENTEE AND THEIR PEERS WITHIN THEIR DISCIPLINE AND THE BROADER ARTS SECTOR.

For Thiago, a scriptwriter, the mentorship addressed a critical need for professional feedback and networking opportunities: "As a writer, the biggest problem is having someone available to read your script and give feedback. Reading a screenplay takes time. It's 120 pages. So having someone that is following up with you, giving feedback, and reading another draft and then another draft is invaluable." Thiago not only benefited from feedback on his script, his mentor also helped him connect with production companies: "You want someone that actually writes and is experienced. My relationship with my mentor has been great—I'm on my third draft, and he's been giving constant feedback, checking up on me. Now we're getting into the last phase, which is the networking. Now that I have a script that is good, we can start sending it to production companies."

While mentorship programs offer significant benefits, some participants highlighted limitations that affected their experiences. Several mentees reported minimal interaction with their mentors, meeting only once or twice before communication ceased. One participant noted that some mentors seemed disengaged, expressing concern that they "probably only met once with a mentor and never met again," feeling that the mentor "took the money" without fulfilling their commitments. This lack of engagement led to worries about accountability and the effectiveness of the mentorship, with mentees fearing they might be "blacklisted" if they reported these issues. Some focus group participants expressed that while their mentors introduced them to their networks, they did not help foster deeper relationships that could lead to long-term support and integration into those networks. Mentorship is not just about making introductions; it involves cultivating relationships between the mentee and their peers within their discipline and the broader arts sector. This highlights the need for mentorship programs to have robust yet flexible structures that ensure accountability and support, with proper training for mentors and clear communication regarding expectations and needs.

3.4

Other sources of support for newcomer artists

In addition to grants and mentorship programs, newcomer artists benefit from a range of support mechanisms that help them navigate the challenges of integrating into Toronto's arts scene. Local organizations play a crucial role in providing resources, fostering connections, and offering practical assistance at the community level.

One significant source of support comes from Toronto's Local Arts Service Organizations (LASOs), North York Arts, Etobicoke Arts, Lakeshore Arts, Scarborough Arts, East End Arts, and Urban Arts. Funded directly by the City of Toronto, these organizations are mandated to serve key regions outside the downtown core. They deliver programming and cultural events, engage in advocacy, and support economic development opportunities for artists and residents in their respective catchment areas. As extensions of the City that are community-based and networked throughout Toronto's community arts scene, the LASOs can play a key role, especially in areas that host a high proportion of newcomers. A program manager with WorkInCulture explained that the LASOs were strongly involved in introducing

newcomer artists and newcomer families to the arts in their community. These LASOs not only provide access to artistic programs but also help newcomers build networks within their local communities, which is essential for their professional development.

Another valuable resource for newcomer artists is the network of local guilds, offering affordable production spaces and opportunities for collaboration. As Farah explains, "many newcomers don't know that there are hubs for craftspeople—like ceramics, weaving, woodworking, or sculpture—that they call guilds. You can get a membership, go there, and practice your work. You get a small space for your equipment, and it's a collective, co-op space. The membership is affordable most of the time."

Organizations such as Small World Music and Neilson Park Creative Centre also play a key role by offering workshops and mentoring programs that help newcomer artists navigate the Canadian arts landscape. These programs teach participants about grant writing, approaching galleries, and understanding the Canadian aesthetic, while fostering connections within the local arts community. For instance, a manager from Neilson

Although these tools are vital, other resources, such as local arts organizations, guilds, and professional development programs, also play an important role in assisting newcomer artists. Together, these support mechanisms help newcomer artists overcome challenges and advance their artistic practices, but continued development of these resources is necessary to address the ongoing complexities of their integration.

Park Creative Centre explained: "Our project enables artists to partake in a year's worth of free activities—free studio space, mentoring sessions, group workshops." The program also provides artists with a platform to showcase their work and engage with the community: "It all culminates with an art exhibition... exposing our community to see a different viewpoint and a different way of making art." These educational experiences can enhance technical skills but also empower newcomer artists by helping them understand how to present their work within the Canadian context.

WorkInCulture is another important resource for newcomer artists. As an organization that advances the careers of artists, creatives, and cultural workers from diverse lived experiences, and supports the organizations that engage them through entrepreneurial and business skills development and innovative research, WorkInCulture has resources specific for newcomers and is looking to expand its services in this area. A program manager with WorkInCulture explains the approach they adopted when developing their guide, *Working in the Arts: Resources and Pathways for Newcomers*: "We took

it from the lens of keeping it very navigational ...This is what you need to consider if you're an artist or an arts professional, what to expect in terms of funding, where to find your communities, what the experience is from the perspective of newcomer artists and also newcomer arts administrators." By providing guidance on navigating the complex arts ecosystem, WorkInCulture helps newcomers gain insights into the professional landscape.

Support mechanisms for newcomer artists, such as grants and mentorship programs, are essential in helping them navigate the Toronto arts scene and develop sustainable careers. Grants provide crucial financial support and open doors to opportunities, while mentorship offers professional guidance and connections to local networks. Although these tools are vital, other resources, such as local arts organizations, guilds, and professional development programs, also play an important role in assisting newcomer artists. Together, these support mechanisms help newcomer artists overcome challenges and advance their artistic practices, but continued development of these resources is necessary to address the ongoing complexities of their integration.

Toward an inclusive art scene

The experiences of newcomer artists in Toronto highlight critical areas where support systems can be enhanced to foster a more inclusive arts community. Drawing from the challenges and successes discussed, we present key lessons and recommendations aimed at empowering newcomer artists and enriching the cultural landscape of the city.

Enhancing information access and guidance

A recurring theme among newcomer artists is the need for better information systems to guide them toward appropriate resources and networks upon arrival. Many reflected that timely access to such information would have saved them significant time and effort. Currently, a gap exists in the provision of tailored information for artists during the settlement process. Settlement organizations, often the first point of contact for newcomers, require training to understand and support careers in the arts effectively. As a program manager with WorkInCulture emphasized, “there need to be training opportunities for settlement organizations to better understand and position careers in the arts as careers.” Moreover, the arts sector can play a proactive role in disseminating information. It was suggested that organizations like Toronto Arts Foundation could create informational booklets to include in welcome packages for newcomers at the airport.

Addressing systemic barriers

To enable newcomer artists to flourish, systemic barriers must be dismantled: Arts institutions and funding bodies should develop frameworks to assess and acknowledge the qualifications and accomplishments of artists from diverse backgrounds. Employers and organizations should value transferable skills and international experience, providing avenues for newcomers to demonstrate their capabilities without prior local experience.

Active efforts are needed to address all forms of discrimination, including linguistic discrimination and racial bias. Arts organizations often focus on diversifying their audiences but must also work on diversifying their workforce and making their workplaces more inclusive. A more hands-on tool and assistance could help to change minds and biases. This involves broadening the understanding of artistic excellence beyond Western-centric models and embracing diverse art forms.

Policies should be revised to allow artists with various immigration statuses to access funding and opportunities. Residency requirements should be flexible enough to include artists living in surrounding areas, ensuring that geographical location does not restrict access to resources. If an artist residing in the Greater Toronto Area but outside Toronto’s municipal boundaries contributes to the city’s arts scene, they enhance its economy, culture, and reputation. Therefore, they should be eligible for the city’s support.

3.5

Promoting cultural representation in mainstream platforms

While Toronto's arts scene has made strides in embracing diversity, there is a risk that progress remains siloed within niche communities. Other jurisdictions can learn from Toronto's diverse contexts by genuinely reflecting Canada's multicultural identity. Mainstream arts institutions must diversify their programming and include more voices from newcomer communities. Divya emphasized diversifying selection committees to ensure fair representation

and understanding of diverse artistic backgrounds: "I've been on panels deciding on grant applications. As a newcomer myself, I understand that past work may have been in another language or medium. That doesn't deter us from awarding the grant; it's actually a plus." By including newcomer artists in decision-making processes and program development, institutions can better represent the rich tapestry of cultures within Toronto.

Improving support mechanisms

Enhancing existing support structures can significantly impact the success of newcomer artists. Simplifying grant application processes and providing additional support for artists facing language barriers would make grants more accessible. While TAC offers workshops and resources in multiple languages, grant writing itself can be a major barrier for many newcomer artists. Participants suggested that grant criteria should be more inclusive of art forms beyond the traditional Western and Eurocentric lens, enriching Toronto's arts scene with diverse perspectives.

Funding models should also consider the livelihood needs of artists, not just project-based expenses. Providing stipends or funding that covers living costs would enable artists to focus more fully on their creative work without the ongoing pressure of financial insecurity.

Strengthening mentorship programs by improving the mentor-mentee matching process could further enhance outcomes. Allowing mentors and mentees to meet and establish relationships before formalizing the mentorship would lead to more meaningful engagements. Additionally, offering mentorship training for potential mentors would help ensure they can develop realistic, tailored plans and maintain commitment throughout the mentorship period. Creating a mentor database accessible to potential mentees and organizing networking events could further foster stronger connections within the arts community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4 Improve information access and guidance for newcomer artists

ENHANCE SETTLEMENT SERVICES TRAINING

Provide training opportunities for settlement organizations to better understand careers in the arts. This can be achieved by developing partnerships between settlement organizations and arts institutions.

CREATE TAILORED RESOURCES

Arts funders and organizations such as Toronto Arts Foundation could create informational materials, like booklets or digital resources, specifically designed for newcomer artists, which could be included in welcome packages or made available at key settlement points like airports.

5 Address systemic barriers and promote inclusivity

ACKNOWLEDGE DIVERSE EXPERIENCES

Arts institutions and employers should value international qualifications and experiences, removing the requirement for Canadian experience in hiring and funding decisions. Funders should also broaden grant criteria to include diverse art forms beyond the Western-centric lens.

COMBAT DISCRIMINATION

Active efforts are required to combat linguistic and racial discrimination in the arts sector. Arts organizations should diversify their workforce, leadership, and selection committees to ensure fair representation from newcomer communities.

7 Make grants more accessible and address livelihood concerns

SIMPLIFY GRANT APPLICATIONS

Arts funders should provide resources and workshops to help newcomer artists with grant applications, especially those facing language barriers. Simplified application processes and additional support for non-English speakers can make grant opportunities more inclusive.

EXPAND FUNDING MODELS TO INCLUDE LIVING EXPENSES

Consider providing grants or stipends that cover not only project costs but also basic living expenses. This would allow newcomer artists to focus more fully on their artistic practice without the constant pressure of financial insecurity.

6 Expand mentorship programs for deeper, sustained relationships

STRENGTHEN MENTORSHIP STRUCTURES

Mentorship programs should provide training for mentors, clarify expectations, and ensure accountability. Matching processes should allow mentors and mentees to build relationships before formal commitments, and mentors should actively help mentees build deeper connections within their professional networks.

BUILD A MENTOR DATABASE

Funders and arts organizations should create a searchable database of experienced mentors to make it easier for newcomer artists to find relevant mentors. Networking events could facilitate connections and help foster long-term support within the arts community.

8 Promote cultural representation in mainstream platforms

DIVERSIFY PROGRAMMING

Mainstream arts institutions should make greater efforts to include diverse voices from newcomer communities in their programming. This includes expanding the representation of newcomer artists on decision-making panels and in selection committees to ensure fair evaluation of artistic work from diverse cultural backgrounds.

ENCOURAGE CROSS-SECTOR DIALOGUE

Funders and arts institutions should organize forums, workshops, and conferences where stakeholders from diverse sectors can discuss promising practices and identify strategies to further support newcomer artists. This could include national gatherings with artists, funders, and organizations to share lessons and develop new approaches to fostering inclusivity in the arts.

Toronto Arts Council's Program for Newcomers and Refugees serves as a compelling model of how targeted support and intentional programming can make a meaningful impact on the lives of newcomer artists and the broader community.

The diverse initiatives undertaken by arts organizations benefiting from the program, along with the journeys of newcomer artists who received mentoring support, provide valuable insights into how the arts can foster immigrant integration.

Throughout this report, we have conveyed the insights shared by participants regarding their achievements in developing arts-based projects for newcomers, the challenges they face in implementing them, the barriers preventing newcomer artists from fully realizing their potential, and the ways

in which these artists navigate the scene, sometimes achieving remarkable success against the odds. Based on these experiences, we have elaborated recommendations for key stakeholders who play a crucial role in fostering integration through the arts: arts funders, arts organizations, and settlement agencies. By acting on these recommendations, they can work together to support the well-being of newcomer communities, empower newcomer artists, and enrich Canada's cultural landscape.

CONCLUSION

Key Findings

Leveraging Arts Funding for Integration

The analysis of arts funding across Canada revealed a significant gap in programs specifically targeting immigrants and refugees. TAC's PNR stands out as a pioneering initiative that addresses this gap by providing dedicated support to newcomer artists and organizations working with these communities. The program's two-pronged approach, offering both engagement grants to organizations and mentorship grants to individual artists, has allowed it to fund a range of community arts projects leveraging the arts to address a range of settlement challenges across diverse communities in Toronto, but also to foster inclusion and diversity within Toronto's arts scene by supporting newcomer artists.

Supporting newcomers through arts-based projects

The projects funded under the PNR demonstrate the transformative power of the arts in addressing settlement challenges. By adopting a holistic approach, these initiatives have successfully addressed immediate needs such as language acquisition, skills development, and mental health support. They have also contributed to longer-term goals like community integration and empowerment. The arts have proven to be an effective medium for newcomers to process their experiences, build confidence, and connect with others.

Empowering newcomer artists

Newcomer artists face unique obstacles, including systemic barriers like the non-recognition of foreign credentials, discrimination, and limited access to networks and resources. Despite these challenges, many have shown remarkable resilience, adapting their practices and leveraging available support mechanisms to navigate the Toronto arts scene. Grants and mentorship programs have played a crucial role in their professional development, although there is room for improvement in making these supports more accessible and effective.

DETAILED RECOMMEN- DATIONS

**FOR
FUNDING
BODIES**
municipal,
provincial
federal
arts
councils

— Create sustainable and flexible funding models

MULTI-YEAR FUNDING

Prioritize multi-year grants to support long-term planning and growth.

EVALUATION AND IMPACT MEASUREMENT

Fund ongoing evaluations to assess the long-term effectiveness of arts-based programs for newcomers, including cross-sectoral comparisons to highlight best practices.

CROSS-SECTORAL PARTNERSHIPS

Develop funding streams that include contributions from settlement, education, and arts ministries, promoting sustainable, multi-sector initiatives.

— Make grants more accessible and address livelihood concerns

SIMPLIFY GRANT APPLICATIONS

Provide workshops and resources tailored for newcomer artists, especially those facing language barriers, to make the grant process more inclusive.

EXPAND FUNDING MODELS TO INCLUDE LIVING EXPENSES

Offer grants or stipends that go beyond project-based funding to cover basic living expenses, allowing artists to focus on their creative work without financial strain.

— Encourage cross-sector collaboration

DEDICATED GRANTS FOR PARTNERSHIPS

Create grants specifically designed to foster collaborations between arts organizations and settlement agencies, integrating the arts into settlement programming and vice versa.

**FOR
ARTS
ORGANIZA-
TIONS AND
INSTITUTIONS**

— **Address systemic barriers and promote inclusivity**

ACKNOWLEDGE DIVERSE EXPERIENCES

Recognize international qualifications and skills, removing the emphasis on Canadian experience in hiring and funding.

COMBAT DISCRIMINATION

Actively work to combat linguistic and racial discrimination by diversifying the workforce, leadership, and selection panels to include representatives from newcomer communities.

CROSS-SECTORAL PARTNERSHIPS

Develop funding streams that include contributions from settlement, education, and arts ministries, promoting sustainable, multi-sector initiatives.

— **Promote cultural representation in mainstream platforms**

DIVERSIFY PROGRAMMING AND PANELS

Increase representation of newcomer voices in programming and on decision-making panels, ensuring fair evaluation of diverse artistic contributions.

EXPAND SELECTION COMMITTEES

Involve newcomer artists in selection committees and program development to foster inclusive perspectives and practices.

— **Expand mentorship programs for deeper, sustained relationships**

STRENGTHEN MENTORSHIP STRUCTURES

Provide mentorship training, ensure clear expectations, and allow mentors and mentees to build relationships prior to formal commitments.

BUILD A MENTOR DATABASE

Establish a searchable mentor database, accessible to newcomer artists, to help them find relevant support and professional connections.

**FOR
SETTLEMENT
ORGANIZA-
TIONS**

— **Improve information access and guidance for newcomer artists**

ACKNOWLEDGE DIVERSE EXPERIENCES

Recognize international qualifications and skills, removing the emphasis on Canadian experience in hiring and funding.

COMBAT DISCRIMINATION

Actively work to combat linguistic and racial discrimination by diversifying the workforce, leadership, and selection panels to include representatives from newcomer communities.

— **Support co-learning opportunities**

ORGANIZE CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS

Coordinate events that bring together arts and settlement sectors, artists, and funders to exchange

knowledge, best practices, and strategies for collaboration. These forums could include national conferences or local co-learning sessions.

FOR
ALL
STAKE-
HOLDERS

— Promote research and knowledge sharing

SUPPORT COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

Encourage studies on arts-based programs for newcomers across regions to identify best practices.

CREATE PLATFORMS FOR KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

Develop online platforms or resource hubs for sharing data, case studies, and best practices among researchers, arts organizations, and settlement agencies.

— Strengthen collaboration between arts and settlement sectors

SUPPORT CAPACITY BUILDING

Provide training and resources for both sectors to understand each other's mandates, helping arts organizations develop culturally relevant programs and settlement agencies utilize the arts in their work.

INCLUDE ARTS RESOURCES IN NEWCOMER WELCOME PACKAGES

Collaborate with immigration authorities to include information on arts opportunities for newcomers, raising awareness of arts pathways from the moment they arrive.

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BEHIND THE SCENES



FIT- ART Policy Workshop –
Fostering integration through
the arts: Insights from
practitioners. Hybrid event at
The Catalyst, The Creative School,
on TMU campus and virtual via
Zoom, June 6, 2024.



THIS REPORT DRAWS ON RESEARCH SUPPORTED BY



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

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sciences humaines du Canada

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THE CERC IN MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION IS GENEROUSLY SUPPORTED BY

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