

Choreographing our Future

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Strategies for supporting next generation arts practice

by Shannon Litzenberger



Metcalf Foundation

The Metcalf Foundation helps Canadians imagine and build a just, healthy, and creative society by supporting dynamic leaders who are strengthening their communities, nurturing innovative approaches to persistent problems, and encouraging dialogue and learning to inform action.

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COVER PHOTO: production still from *Everyday Marvels* by Shannon Litzenberger. Clockwise from top left, dancers are: Kassi Scott, Marie Lambin-Gagnon, Brittany Duggan and Samantha Grist. Photo credit: Kevin Konnyu.

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Foreword

I have been a professional dance artist in Canada for over a decade. During this time I have experienced firsthand the many challenges and complexities inherent in Canada's current system of public support for the arts. I have seen my own experiences echoed across a generation of practitioners who are rising in what could be characterized as a post-institution-building era. I have been part of many green room conversations that highlight major disconnects between how the professional arts are supported and the actual work that artists are creating.

One consequence of these disconnects is that support for new and innovative enterprise is limited. It is also very possible that a contemporary diverse expression, reflective of Canada's evolving identity, is being stifled.

In 2010, I was named the first-ever Metcalf Arts Policy Fellow. As both a practicing artist and arts policy thinker, I've been keen to consider and experiment with new solutions to our industry's most pressing challenges. My three-year fellowship with the Metcalf Foundation has given me time to consider the relationship between arts funding and arts practice in Canada and ask critical questions about public investment. Questions such as: What kinds of working models best facilitate the creation, production, and distribution of art? Where can partnerships be leveraged to better resource the sector? How can artists and arts organizations better engage with, and create value for, the communities and audiences they serve?

I have also had an opportunity to take stock of current industry trends at home and abroad with the goal of identifying ways in which the arts sector can better adapt to its changing environment. I met with more than 100 cultural leaders across Canada, the US, the UK, and Australia, and have re-emerged from this in-depth study of arts policy with a better understanding of how Canada might begin to address its own process of systemic evolution in order to better support the next generation of arts practice.

Grounded in both theory and practice, *Choreographing our Future* offers insight into how the arts industry can inspire and support a new, exciting era of arts development in Canada. It offers a lens through which to view arts development that brings into focus what professional artists need in order to be able to create innovative content, meaningfully connect with audiences, and develop effective resourcing strategies. It invites practitioners and funders alike to embrace change with courage, curiosity, and imagination.

Introduction

Today's environment is radically different than in decades past. Artistic innovation often blurs the lines between disciplines and genres. Modes of production and dissemination made possible by new technology challenge traditional forms of presentation. And art can be created everywhere, by anyone. It is broader and more innovative.

Changing demographics, global interconnectedness, and new patterns of audience engagement have broadened the scope and nature of artistic offerings. The culture of participation and personal creative expression is growing rapidly, defining a more multi-modal form of engagement that goes beyond simple consumption. New pressures to explore alternative funding and revenue sources have given rise to a new generation of collaborative, flexible, and adaptive creative enterprises. These enterprises are challenging organizational models that assume a set structure and a path of indefinite growth and independence.

For nearly 60 years, governments have invested in the development of a rich and diverse arts and culture infrastructure in Canada aimed at supporting a vibrant mosaic of artistic expression. Public funds continue to play a key role in supporting the evolution of the country's artistic identity. However, as our cultural expression evolves, there is a need to relook at some of the fundamental assumptions and strategies behind how the arts are supported and sustained in Canada. As development of the sector now easily outpaces the growth of government investment, policies that were created to support and sustain a thriving cultural sector have created a legacy of structures, models, working practices, and behaviours that are becoming increasingly challenged.

New artists entering the field year over year, unaccompanied by commensurate growth in existing support structures, has created pressure on the "system." This expansion, combined with evolutions in the working environment, has set the stage for major change. The old model of arts infrastructure development, designed to grow independent art institutions, is no longer a viable path to future industry development.

As a new generation of artists and arts enterprises move away in more dramatic fashion than ever before from traditional organizational structures and ways of working, how do we support future development in the arts? If new artists are not seeding the institutions of the future, how can our systems of support effectively steward a new generation to reach its artistic potential? How can we reprioritize the connection between arts practice and the interests and values of a diverse set of stakeholders and communities?

When searching for answers to such questions I believe it is critical to ask yet one more question: What are the essential ingredients of arts creation, production, and dissemination? A framework for enabling success that takes into consideration the variety of ways artistic content and experiences are created and produced in today's working environment can be a very helpful guide in our search to understand how best to realign public support.

For an artist or an arts enterprise of any size, I believe there are three key competencies that are essential for success:

Ability to create and innovate

An ability to create high quality artistic content, including the ability to explore creative process, to innovate and take creative risks, to develop skills and acquire knowledge, to build a body of work, and to develop a unique artistic voice.

Ability to relate and connect

An ability to connect meaningfully to publics, communities, audiences, funders, patrons, supporters, and stakeholders who share mutual interest and gain value from the artistic content and associated experiences.

Ability to develop an effective arts enterprise

An ability to develop appropriate resourcing strategies, structural models, and ways of working that effectively support artistic activities.

These three competencies provide a holistic view of arts development that reaches beyond infrastructure growth. They also provide the three-part structure to this paper; each part explores best ways to support artists by addressing one of these competencies.

The recommendations contained in *Choreographing our Future* are not intended as prescribed solutions. They are designed to trigger a more informed debate within the sector about new ways to address future arts development. They are also a call to action for the arts community and its funders to reconsider our collective future and imagine how we will instigate change in support of future generations.

PART ONE

Fuelling artistic innovation: Challenging the discipline-based model

THE FIRST ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY

To create and innovate, artists and arts enterprises need to be able to develop a unique artistic voice, create high quality content, explore the creative process, innovate, take risks, and develop skills and acquire knowledge.

In September of 2012, I premiered my first major full-length solo work: *HOMEbody ... lessons in prairie living*. It was an exploration of identity, belonging, and place, through the lens of my own experience growing up on a farm in Canada's rural prairie and then moving to Toronto — the largest city in the country.

My investigation of home touched on themes of location, time, age, perspective, memory, tradition, transformation, personal history, and geography. It was a great challenge to craft a contemporary dance piece that could speak to all of these things and I found that the integration of other elements such as video and recorded text became important. Without really knowing what to call it, I described it promotionally as a “multi-disciplinary tour-de-force that combines dance, film, and storytelling.” I was dabbling in the space between artistic forms and genres — a space I see occupied more often among an emerging and increasingly diverse generation of practitioners.

The development of *HOMEbody* spanned nearly four years. Echoing the experience of many of my artistic peers and colleagues, periods of creative development had been preceded by hopeful but mostly unsuccessful grant requests from various arts councils. The proposed work didn't seem to fit well into the prescribed boxes. The dance didn't make sense without the integration of the other elements and the work didn't translate well on video in its developmental phases. It wasn't really dance but it wasn't really not dance.

After over a dozen failed attempts at accessing public support for this particular project, I decided to conduct an experiment. I created a new short work that would serve only as support material for a final grant request. I spent two weeks in a studio creating a duet full of big, technical dancing and

choreographic craft that translated well on video and exemplified the qualities I thought were most often supported by arts council juries. I got the grant.

I offer this anecdote to illustrate the kind of experiences many professional artists face today. The struggle becomes not only to define one's practice, but to compress it squarely into the established categories of practice supported by various funding bodies. As growing numbers of creators blur the lines between art forms, it is worth asking if our discipline-based funding mindset is hindering our ability to explore innovative artistic practice. Could a different kind of framework of assessment provide new opportunities for innovation and groundbreaking creativity?



Legacies of discipline-based funding

As artistic activity in Canada has evolved and proliferated over many decades, a discipline-based funding system has dominated. Within this system, requests for public funds are assessed primarily for their artistic merit as determined by professional peers, and defined by discipline, genre, and sub-genres of practice. It is in this context that funding decisions are shaped across many Canadian arts councils including the Toronto Arts Council, Ontario Arts Council, and Canada Council for the Arts.

Yet the nature of artistic practice has evolved considerably since we adopted the discipline-based model over 50 years ago. Art forms have expanded to include a much wider landscape of activity. More artists are blurring the boundaries between forms and genres. The accessibility and integration of technology, the increasing diversity of contemporary arts practitioners, and the rise of lateral structures and collaborative working models are all catalysts for this trend.

As we attempt to address new creative development in the field, the legacy and impact of our discipline-based funding practices present several challenges for the artist, for the arts community, and for the public funder. For the artist, obtaining public support is an increasingly politicized process of meeting specific program criteria while satisfying the highly subjective notion of artistic excellence through the lens of experienced, but self-interested peers. More and more, it can be a challenge to have representation of practice even within discipline-based peer juries. Funding results can be inconsistent and unpredictable, particularly in project-based programs. Artists who take creative risks, who are in essence ahead of the innovation curve, are potentially the most limited in their access to public support.

Another unintended side effect of the discipline-based funding model is the creation of artificial silos among communities of practice. While there has

always been collaboration among artists, for the most part, theatre, dance, music, literary, visual, and more recently media arts, all work hard to differentiate themselves from each other in the arts marketplace. At times these art forms even compete against each other in the pursuit of valued public resources. Conversations about policy reform and systemic evolution become nearly impossible when communities are accustomed to protecting and preserving their share of investment. Even community-based support structures, such as arts service organizations, unions, and associations, are defined primarily by artistic disciplines. Attempts at broad-based collaboration among these groups have been challenging at best.

The current model has also created challenges for the arts councils themselves. Many have aimed to respond by creating streams of funding through new categories such as “media arts” and “integrated arts.” In some cases they have amended their criteria of evaluation in existing programs to remain inclusive as the field evolves. However, these are not perfect solutions. Funding levels for new disciplines are far behind their entrenched counterparts. And categories like “integrated arts” or “multi-arts” — created to address work that doesn’t match our discipline-based categories — become a catchall for projects and organizations that don’t fit anywhere and, as a group, are hard to evaluate against each other.

Despite efforts to evolve within the existing framework, the industry may have reached a point where a large complement of arts discipline-based funding categories can no longer capture the diversity of activity present in the field.

[Exploring alternative approaches to arts funding](#)

In 2010 and 2011, I had the opportunity to travel abroad to learn about the funding policies and practices of arts agencies in the United States, England, and Australia. In my conversations with other public arts funding agencies it was always apparent that Canadian arts councils are recognized as global leaders in arts funding delivery. In particular, Canada is highly regarded for our arm’s-length funding model, our flexible and rigorous peer-assessment systems, and for our balanced approach to capitalizing the arts through a mix of private, public, and earned revenues. Despite Canada’s strong reputation, I believe there is great value to be had by looking at the approaches of sister agencies.

One of the most striking observations I made is that most of the agencies I met with have moved from a discipline-based to an industry-based funding model. This includes the National Endowment for the Arts (USA), Arts Council England (UK), Arts Victoria (Australia), and municipal arts offices in Melbourne and Sydney (Australia). Unlike discipline-based funding models, industry-based models frame activity into areas such as: arts development, community engagement, education, and dissemination.

Arts Council England, Arts Victoria, and the City of Melbourne have all adopted funding frameworks that focus on the interrelationship of an arts ecosystem (research and development, creation, production, presentation, distribution, market development), rather than a series of arts disciplines. I believe the experiences of these agencies can offer new perspectives on how public resources in Canada could be used to address our first competency — the ability to create and innovate. Aspects of their structures, policies, and programs can help inspire our own homegrown solutions for addressing the development of artistic capacity.

Arts Council England

In July of 2011, I spent 10 days in London meeting with Arts Council England's research team as well as Chief Executive Alan Davey. It was a precarious time economically. The prior year the Council had received news of a 30% budget cut to take effect over four years. By 2014, the Council's budget would shrink from £587M to £367M. The Council was taking a significant look at its funding programs and priorities. A new strategic plan published in November of 2010, *Achieving Great Art for Everyone*,¹ was to guide the Council's activities and funding decisions over the next several years.

Arts Council England allocates funds through two major funding programs. The first, ***Grant-in-Aid***, provides ongoing support to a national portfolio of close to 700 arts organizations in an annual or multi-year format. Support to these "regularly funded organizations," or RFO's, is similar to Canada's operating grant programs for arts organizations. Organizations are assessed against five strategic goals relating to artistic excellence, public access, sustainability and innovation, diversity, and education.

The second program, ***Grants for the arts***, supports project-based activity undertaken by either individuals or organizations. In order to remain "flexible and to encourage new ideas,"² this funding support is not framed by specific eligibility categories and deadlines. Instead, it uses an open application process whereby individuals and organizations can propose time-limited, project-based arts activities that reflect an ecosystem of practice. Arts activities can include projects and events, commissions and productions, research and development activities, marketing activities, audience development, education activities, buying assets, professional development, residencies, touring activities, and others. The program is meant to be open and flexible to allow for a diverse range of activity to be supported.

¹ Arts Council England. *Achieving Great Art for Everyone: A strategic framework for the arts*. 2010.

² Arts Council England. "Grants for the arts: How to apply." <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/apply-for-funding/grants-for-the-arts/>, accessed on March 7, 2013.

Arts Council England employs a highly systematized approach to manage applications for *Grants for the arts*. Applications are sent to a central processing office in Manchester where an arts discipline-specific specialist scores the submission. Criteria for assessment include four areas: artistic merit, public access, management, and financial viability. Each are scored on a scale of unmet (0) to met-outstanding (4). Applications that receive an overall score of 2 (met) or higher in all of the categories are sent to one of nine regional offices.

Regional councils make final granting decisions taking into account regional contexts and consideration for supporting a diverse scope of activity within their communities. Budget allocations from the Council are allocated by region, not discipline. Funding requests for £15,000 or less are processed in 6 weeks, while requests over £15,000 require a 12-week turnaround time.

It's worth noting that only a decade ago, *Grants for the arts* was administered with a discipline-based framework and peer-assessment process similar to Canada's. That system was abandoned in favour of the current open access model. According to Davey, their current system is preferred because it focuses on funding the best ideas, rather than funding pre-defined kinds of activities.

In my view, *Grants for the arts* has three features that are important to consider.

1. Open access

Open access means applicants seek funding through a single program and define their activity and practice on their own terms. This allows greater freedom for the artist or arts organization to define their work, practice, or proposal, and eliminates the need to tailor artistic activities to specific categories or criteria. It has the effect of empowering artists to innovate without being affected or limited by program eligibility constraints. Although it works without a discipline-specific framework, discipline-specific specialists are still part of the funding decision, allowing for discipline-based expertise to inform the assessment of artistic quality.

2. Continuous application intake

For an artist, timing can be everything. The relatively fast turnaround time for notification and the elimination of fixed deadlines allow artists to access support for projects with less lead time. The elimination of deadlines enables a more fluid flow of artistic activity within the arts ecosystem, prevents bottlenecks of artistic programming throughout the year, and allows artists to respond to opportunities that arise in short order.

3. Calibrated assessment rigour

Calibrated assessment rigour means matching the level of funds requested with the level of scrutiny applied to the application. It allows artists and arts organizations to access smaller amounts of support with less administrative burden than peers seeking greater levels of support. Typically, smaller funding requests represent projects such as research and development, professional development, small-scale creation, or even an artist's first grant. A calibrated approach provides increased efficiency for both the funder and the artist.

Arts Victoria

In December of 2011, I travelled to Australia. The time of my visit coincided with the release of a national cultural policy discussion paper. Both industry and government were reflecting on how policies and priorities could shift to better support an evolving arts practice.

The policy review spurred a major shift in the model used to distribute funds. In a July 2, 2013 article in *The Australian*, journalist Matthew Westwood writes, "The Australia Council for the Arts has broken with the tradition of 40 years ... No longer will funding be directed through specific channels for music, theatre, dance, literature, visual arts and so on."³

While this transition was seminal for **Australia Council for the Arts**, abandonment of a discipline-based funding model happened nearly two decades earlier for **Arts Victoria**. Arts Victoria is Australia's largest state arts funding body and is "charged with making the arts available and accessible to all Victorians and with supporting and developing Victoria's artists and creative industries."⁴ Located in the state capital of Melbourne, the agency is situated directly within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

The 1994 release of the arts policy document, *Arts 21*,⁵ was a pivotal moment for the Victorian arts sector. It defined Arts Victoria's industry-based framework for public arts investment which is still upheld as a best practice. In 1997, Tim Jacobs, then Director of Arts Victoria, stated that the government of Victoria's strategy was to "strengthen the industry's positioning, its performance and its potential."⁶ It did so by entrenching arts and culture into a broader economic, social, and cultural government-wide policy construct.

³ Westwood, Matthew. "Shock of the new dynamic shift." <http://m.theaustralian.com.au/arts/shock-of-the-new-dynamic-shift/story-e6frg8n6-1226672774178>, *The Australian*. July 2, 2013.

⁴ Government of Victoria. "Arts Victoria." <http://www.arts.vic.gov.au/Home>, accessed on February 25, 2013.

⁵ Arts Victoria. *Arts 21: The Victorian Government's Strategy for the Arts into the Twenty-First Century*. 1994.

⁶ Jacobs, Tim. 1997, *Arts 21 – The Victorian Government's Strategy for the Arts*, Cultural Policy Case Studies, (ed.) J. Craik, Australia Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy, Griffith University.

Arts Victoria's current staff had little memory of the transition to the industry-based model. They did, however, point me to a 2007 article, by Hilary Glow and Katya Johanson,⁷ in which the authors identify key issues that spurred the discussion and decision to adopt the current model.

For one, the old system was seen to encourage "the creation of 'coteries' of artists who perpetuated one another's funding while excluding a larger pool of potential funding recipients."⁸ It was felt that the industry approach could better address new arts disciplines that were emerging as a result of communications and technology trends. It was also deemed that "the industry approach provided a means by which the arts could be incorporated into the dominant policy discourse of government."⁹

One of the challenges to the industry-based model was the notion that more experimental art, that takes bigger creative risks, would be less likely to be funded. The counter-argument to this notion was that the new model would better facilitate a connection to audiences and "develop avenues for developing new audiences in the future."¹⁰ This would mean being able to build capacity in the field through stronger connections to audiences and communities, and in turn, reduce reliance on government resources.

Individual artists and arts organizations are funded across nine distinct strategic funding program areas. Program areas range from arts development, community partnerships, and education partnerships, to indigenous arts development, regional partnerships, and touring. Most programs offer two deadlines per year and applicants may receive only one grant per funding category per financial year.

Funding decisions are made through a two-tiered assessment process. Arts Victoria program staff review applications and shortlist all eligible applicants. The short list is then evaluated by an Arts Advisory Panel.

Panel members are drawn from an Advisory Panel Register — a database of individuals with a range of skills and expertise, including specialist arts skills as well as skills that are complementary to the arts, such as business skills, public governance, strategic planning, community affairs, law, academic research, and leadership experience. Each panel is comprised of individuals from across the arts industry sector as well as other members of the Victorian community. Panel composition takes into account a balance of art form representation, cultural backgrounds, ages, and understanding of both the urban and regional contexts. The names of panel members are published online in advance of the program deadlines.

⁷ Glow, Hilary and Johanson, Katya. 2007. "Turning Victoria into cultural capital: Victorian arts policy 1992-1999." *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 90.

⁸ Glow and Johanson. "Turning Victoria into cultural capital." pp 123-132.

⁹ Glow and Johanson. "Turning Victoria into cultural capital." pp 123-132.

¹⁰ Glow and Johanson. "Turning Victoria into cultural capital." pp 123-132.

There are two features of the Arts Victoria model that I believe have significant benefits worthy of consideration.

1. A strategic funding framework

The industry-focused model provides creative freedom to the artist — an essential condition to be able to create and innovate. It allows artists and arts organizations to fully define their own artistic terms within the strategic framework of available investment. Arts Victoria is unique in its policy alignment with state government which enables a greater degree of connection and understanding between the arts industry and the social, cultural, and economic goals of government. It provides the opportunity to respond more effectively to changing environmental conditions by aligning strategic goals with emergent trends both in the arts sector and in the broader civic environment. Such goals can include youth engagement, developing cultural identity, or encouraging cultural participation among citizens.

2. Diverse assessment panels

Arts Victoria's assessment model offers two features that could be considered in the Canadian context. One is the cross-disciplinary nature of arts experts engaged in the Arts Advisory Panels. The second is the integration of Victorian citizens who, much like arts board members, offer complementary skills to arts expert panellists. This kind of diversity within the assessment process can help address some of the challenges experienced in a more insular discipline-based peer-assessment model.

It should be noted that the Ontario Arts Council, since 2000, has included a community or arts organization board member on its assessment panels for all operating grant juries.

The City of Melbourne

In 2012, shortly after my visit to the City of Melbourne, *The Economist* identified it as the most livable city in the world.¹¹ Melbourne certainly exudes a distinct and vibrant cultural scene characterized by famous graffiti laden laneways, a mix of historic and contemporary architecture, a prominent presence of indigenous cultural expression, and a buzzing nightlife. Locals and tourists alike fill the central business district 24/7 to take in the city's creative offerings.

¹¹ Economist Intelligence Unit.
https://www.eiu.com/public/topical_report.aspx?campaignid=Liveability2012, accessed on February 27, 2013.

The City of Melbourne's Arts and Culture Branch is housed in the city's most environmentally advanced commercial facility. It's hard not to notice its unique features. There is a passive water-based air-cooling system, an abundance of natural light and indoor vegetation, as well as sophisticated solar energy and hot water systems. Given this impressive environment, it's clear that Melbourne's progressive policy mindset is key to their most livable city status.

I had the pleasure of meeting several staff members at the Arts and Culture Branch including Creative Spaces Program Manager, Eleni Arbus, and Team Leader of Arts Investment, Michelle Ely. Through City Council's Community Services Portfolio, the City of Melbourne offers a series of arts grants to individuals and organizations, and also programs a handful of city-owned or operated historical venues.

Investment is directed within a strategic funding framework via three major funding channels: arts grants, a public art program, and arts and heritage collections. A Triennial Program (Arts and Culture)¹² funded 39 arts organizations on a multi-year basis from 2009-2011. The Arts Grants segment supports both individual artists and arts organizations. It provides "flexible support for projects and non-recurrent activities."¹³ Within this stream there are nine distinct granting programs — such as Arts and Participation Projects and Young Artists — reflective of the current priorities articulated in Melbourne's 2009-2011 Arts Strategy.

According to Ely's description, the application process for these grants is very similar to those of the Toronto Arts Council, Ontario Arts Council, or Canada Council for the Arts. Applicants submit proposals responding to a set of application guidelines, including the submission of a budget and examples of work.

The evaluation process for all Arts Grants Programs involves an external assessment panel of peers across disciplines. Criteria for panel selection include expertise across one or more art forms, specialist art expertise, cultural diversity, and wide experience in a community.

Essential assessment criteria for all arts grants include artistic or cultural merit, activity that reflects and strengthens Melbourne's identity as a city for the arts, innovation in approach, financial viability and sound management, and achievability. Some additional "desirable criteria" include an ability to reflect or strengthen Melbourne's cultural diversity, a capacity to reflect or critique local identity, a capacity to stimulate active community involvement, and funding support from other sources. Panels are convened per art form, with up to 15

¹² City of Melbourne.

<http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/ABOUTCOUNCIL/GRANTSSPONSORSHIP/ARTSGRANTS/Pages/TriennialProgram.aspx>, accessed on March 7, 2013.

¹³ City of Melbourne. "Triennial Program (Arts & Culture) 2009-2011 Application Requirements." May 2008.

panel members from across all art forms and a maximum of 4 artists per art form on any given panel.

Melbourne's funding structure and assessment process provides potential considerations for Canada, particularly at the municipal level.

1. A strategic funding framework

The ability to define strategic priorities over time is an asset of Melbourne's industry-based model. It frames programs around an arts ecosystem and allows opportunities to shift priorities in order to support specific areas of the ecosystem in need of attention at specific moments in time. Presentation in rural areas, support for international exchange, new investment for emerging artists, and the integration of new technologies in artistic creation are examples.

2. Multidisciplinary peer-assessment panels

During my time in Melbourne, I had a number of interesting conversations with arts investment staff about the manner in which funding outcomes had changed since they moved to cross-disciplinary assessment panels. While there is no researched facts or documented evidence to confirm that cross-disciplinary panels produce more objective results, it's interesting to know that Melbourne's granting staff believes that this is the case.

Ely, in particular, reported that multi-disciplinary panellists tend to be more objective in their assessments because they have less external context for the applications they are reviewing.¹⁴ This seems to be particularly relevant at the municipal level, owing to a smaller arts sector community. She also noted that among discipline-based peers, despite efforts to distinguish taste from artistic merit, subjective taste and aesthetic preferences can creep into the assessment process.

New pathways to fuelling artistic innovation

We know that the Canadian system reflects many international best practices in arts funding, including our arm's-length model and comprehensive peer-assessment systems. Yet our future position as a global leader in arts policy relies on our ability to continue adapting to the quickly changing environment. Enabling artistic innovation is key to our evolution as an industry. Major shifts in arts practice are necessitating a reconsideration of even the most fundamental aspects of our arts funding model.

As Arts Council England, Arts Victoria, and the City of Melbourne's Arts and Culture Branch show us, there are a number of admirable alternative arts

¹⁴ Interview with Michelle Ely, Senior Arts Investment Officer, City of Melbourne, December 6, 2011. Melbourne, Australia.

funding practices that could be employed in Canada. If we want to instigate creative evolution in the arts then we should be prepared to challenge the merits of our current discipline-based funding model. And while art form based peer-assessment may be considered a best practice, a shift to a new funding model will likely require adopting complementary methods of evaluation.

PART TWO

Relating and connecting: New opportunities for public engagement in the arts

THE SECOND ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY

Artists and arts enterprises need to be able to relate and connect meaningfully with audiences, communities, funders, patrons, supporters, and stakeholders who share an interest and gain value from artistic content and associated experiences.

As a professional artist, I believe that providing communities and audiences with opportunities for creative engagement is at the core of my role. Whether by sharing a performance, facilitating a participation-based arts experience, or simply inspiring others to create themselves, I want to use my artistic knowledge and experience to help people connect meaningfully with art.

My newest work, *Everyday Marvels*, was developed at the intersection of community engagement and professional performance creation. It is a collaboration between over 60 professional and community-based artists through a unique partnership with the Gardiner Museum and the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) Employee Volunteer Program. This episodic performance installation is based on a volume of poetry called *The Book of Marvels – A Compendium of Everyday Things* by Governor General Award-winning poet Lorna Crozier. Seen through the lens of Crozier's poetic voice, everyday objects such as a radiator, a table, and flashlights come to life through contemporary performance. This new work was recently presented by the Gardiner Museum as part of 2013 Nuit Blanche – an all-night free contemporary art event.

The installation featured 16 miniature vignettes (or 'marvels') created by eight local contemporary dance choreographers. It was performed by professional and community-based performers, including independent artists, graduating professional dance students, and an enthusiastic group of RBC employees.

The participation of RBC staff as performers created a meaningful platform for creative exchange between RBC's corporate community and professional contemporary dance artists. It brought new financial resources to the project and created meaningful connections among the participants. After only a few

rehearsals, RBC staff members expressed enthusiasm for the learning opportunities, health benefits, and camaraderie offered by the creative process. They have also expressed a new appreciation for contemporary dance and an intention to deepen their experience by attending more contemporary dance events in their city.



In October 2012, the Canada Council for the Arts released a discussion paper emphasizing a renewed focus on public engagement.¹⁵ In the paper they define public engagement as “actively engaging more people in the artistic life of society notably through attendance, observation, curation, active participation, co-creation, learning, cultural mediation and creative self-expression.”

Since its inception in 1957, the Canada Council has been mandated “to foster and promote the study, enjoyment and production of works in the arts.”¹⁶ Similar to other national public arts funding bodies, Canada Council has always played a role in nurturing the relationship between art and public.

So, if public engagement has been a core part of the Canada Council for over 50 years, why is the Council now highlighting public engagement as a priority? One reason might be that Canada has reached a milestone in its cultural maturity, establishing a diverse and critical mass of Canadian practitioners, infrastructure, physical capital, and artistic activity from coast to coast to coast.

Over the past half-century, the Canada Council and other Canadian public arts funders have focused on developing the arts in order to establish a rich, diverse, vibrant landscape of arts activity across the country. As the Canada Council states: “The emphasis was on supporting the cultural offer — ensuring that Canada had a cadre of trained artists able to create, produce and disseminate quality art to the public... Part of the rationale at the time was the need to counteract the influence of American and other cultures.”¹⁷ The Canada Council acknowledges that the traditional funding model adopted by Canadian public arts funders casts the public in the role of observer, rather than participant, “receivers, rather than creators of cultural meaning.”¹⁸

Going forward, consideration for future arts development is and will be different than in decades past. Relationships developed around shared value and mutual interest will play a greater role. When considered over the long term, an initial investment in the “supply” side of the industry naturally segues to applying a greater focus on the “demand” side.

¹⁵ Canada Council for the Arts. *Public Engagement in the Arts*. Discussion paper. October 16, 2012.

¹⁶ Canada Council for the Arts. <http://www.canadacouncil.ca/aboutus/Background/default.htm>, accessed on March 5, 2013.

¹⁷ Canada Council for the Arts. *Public Engagement in the Arts*. p.11.

¹⁸ Canada Council for the Arts. *Public Engagement in the Arts*. p.11.

Another reason for prioritizing public engagement at this time might be that the nature of engagement in the arts is shifting. As is evident in many current studies, the ways in which people connect with and engage in the arts is changing. New technologies have significantly democratized cultural engagement, allowing audiences to not only consume, support, and participate, but also to curate, design, and create unique and personalized experiences. This shift presents an extraordinary opportunity for the professional arts sector to assert its role in new and diverse ways as an expert facilitator of creative life. To do this, we must better encourage a meaningful connection between the arts and communities, audiences, funders, patrons, supporters, the public, and stakeholders who share mutual interest and gain value from the artistic content and associated experiences we create.

Audience development activities that we are familiar with, such as savvy marketing strategies, social media campaigns, or education and outreach programs, are not enough to build strong relationships grounded in shared value and relevance. These are often one-way conversations that align well with the producer-consumer model. Embracing cultural engagement in all its forms requires a two-way conversation where the artist is also listening and working in service to community goals. To make meaning for their audiences, artists need to explore different ways of engaging people as active participants rather than simply as passive observers.

Emerging trends in arts engagement

Since 2009, Canada's annual Culture Days event has been a focal point for public engagement activities. It aims to inspire greater participation in arts and culture. Throughout towns and cities across the country, free, interactive public events attract hundreds of thousands of participants each year. In 2012, community members in Huron County were invited to create a public work of art that uses a living tree as the blank canvas. In North Vancouver, Presentation House Gallery gave young photographers a platform to expand their visual literacy through the subject of home and cultural identity. Success stories collected have provided considerable anecdotal evidence to illustrate the positive impact of interactive and participatory forms of arts engagement.

This year, Culture Days embarked on a year-round public engagement initiative to provide online tools and resources to the arts sector to support and inspire deeper connections between the arts and the public. To launch this initiative, Culture Days hosted its first National Congress in May of 2013. "The Art of Engagement: Finding, Igniting and Keeping Audiences" brought together hundreds of participants from the cultural community and beyond to discuss how the arts environment is changing and how audiences can be more effectively engaged in creative experiences.

Despite a growing appetite for discussion and information about public arts engagement, Canada's formal research efforts on the subject are lacking. We have some data on levels of arts attendance and participation, perceptions of arts and cultural events, and the role of government in supporting the arts, but very little qualitative data to help us understand the nature of arts engagement or how people ascribe value to their experiences. If we are to design effective arts engagement strategies, this information is essential.

Comprehensive arts participation studies have been done in the US, the UK, and Australia. These studies use new metrics to assess qualitative and intrinsic impacts of arts engagement and provide more helpful information about the real value of the relationship between the arts and community. All have consistently illustrated that the ways in which people want to experience art and culture is changing.

In the US, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has been conducting the *Periodic Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* since 1982. Multiple modes of participation are cited, including arts attendance, personal creation and performance, and participation through electronic media. Their most recent study reveals that "alternatives for arts and entertainment activities have proliferated, and expectations for personalization and individual control over those experiences have increased."¹⁹ The study notes that attendance at "benchmark" activities such as ballet, opera, or classical music concerts has declined. It also confirms that the evolution of art forms themselves is "rapidly introducing new or blended forms that infuse technology, different cultural traditions and elements of multiple arts disciplines ... expanding beyond purpose-built arts facilities, moving into bookstores, community centers, schools, places of worship and especially the home."²⁰

The strongest predictor of almost all arts participation is identified as arts education. Media-based participation also increases the likelihood of attendance at live events, as well as engagement in personal arts performance and creation.

Since 2005, the UK has been conducting a similar survey called *Taking Part: The National Survey on Culture, Leisure and Sport*.²¹ *Taking Part* reveals that income, and higher levels of education, have a positive correlation with levels of arts attendance and participation. Similar to the findings of the US study, attending or participating in the arts as a child results in a higher rate of engagement as an adult. *Taking Part* also collects qualitative data to help understand how participants perceive the quality of their experiences as well as what motivates them to attend. Most indicate that they attend because the arts

¹⁹ National Endowment for the Arts (US). *Survey of Public Participation in the Arts*. 2008.

²⁰ National Endowment for the Arts (US). *Survey of Public Participation in the Arts*. p. 15.

²¹ Government of England. Department of Culture, Media and Sport. "Taking Part: The National Survey of Culture, Leisure and Sport." (2010 Statistical Release). March 2011.

are fun and entertaining, bring colour and excitement to their lives, are a good way of spending time with friends and family, and because it encourages them to think differently about things.

Finally, the survey aims to find out more about people who don't engage. It identifies this group as individuals with low incomes, low levels of education, people with disabilities, people from some ethnic groups, and individuals who did not experience art in childhood. These groups indicated that they feel that art is not for people like them or that there are few opportunities for engagement available to them.

Australia's 2010 study, *More than bums on seats: Australian participation in the arts*,²² offers a comprehensive portrait of how Australians engage in the arts. It concludes that the arts are strongly supported and that attitudes towards the arts are increasingly positive. The study identifies the Internet as a key tool for the arts, that interest in indigenous arts is growing, and concludes that there are significant opportunities to build arts audiences.

Understanding how individuals and communities prioritize their cultural experiences informs public engagement offerings. Unfortunately, research data in Canada is inconsistent and difficult to compare to studies such as those conducted in the US, UK, and Australia, because of different survey methodologies.

The *Arts and Heritage in Canada* study conducted periodically by Canadian Heritage notes, "the research results are intended only to be used by the department to assist in evaluating programs and in developing policy with respect to the arts and heritage."²³ The 2012 survey results report that 83% of Canadians attended at least one type of live performance or arts event in the past year, 71% are using the Internet to engage in the arts, and 57% reported that they were "personally involved" in at least one artistic activity in the last 12 months. This could, however, include anything from making a donation to an arts or cultural organization, purchasing a membership or subscription online, or taking a dance/music/art class, among other activities. Age (under 55), household income (\$80,000+) and level of education (undergraduate degree or higher) seem to have a positive impact on overall levels of arts participation.

Notable in the study's conclusions is that Canadian attendance at live performances and visual art exhibits has declined. The importance Canadians attribute to the arts in terms of quality of life has also declined. Perhaps most alarming is that the level of interest in new works or artists is "significantly lower" than in previous years. These results may be suggesting an increasing disconnect between artistic content being created and the creative interests of

²² Australia Council for the Arts. *More than bums on seats: Australian participation in the arts*. 2010.

²³ Government of Canada. Department of Canadian Heritage. *Arts and Heritage in Canada: Access and Availability Survey 2012*. Phoenix Strategic Perspectives Inc. November 2012.

Canadians. If engagement in new arts creation is declining, then it's essential to find ways to connect artistic content with new audiences.

Cultural value and new forms of arts engagement

In June of 2011, I had the pleasure of spending the day in Chicago where I participated in *Future of the City: The Arts Symposium*. The symposium was a joint venture between the Cultural Policy Centre at the University of Chicago and the National Endowment of the Arts. The event showcased leading thinkers interested in enhancing the relationship between the arts and cities, including John Holden, former researcher at the UK-based policy think tank DEMOS, and Alan Brown of Wolf Brown Consulting, a leading public engagement research firm in the US.

Holden presented concepts from his 2004 paper, *Capturing Cultural Value*.²⁴ The paper outlines three interconnected viewpoints — instrumental, intrinsic, and institutional — through which we can consider the value of an arts experience.

Instrumental value is objective. It's a tool or instrument to achieve another aim. For example, art stimulates economic activity, improves educational performance, or lowers crime rates. Instrumental value can be easily quantified and measured.

Intrinsic value cannot be easily measured. It is the impact of an arts experience on an individual as defined by that individual. This value is always subjective and a major motivator for personal arts engagement.

Institutional value is the way in which cultural organizations behave. It is not so much about what they do, but *how* they do it, which impacts a collective perception of trust, civility, equality, and social well-being.

These values, as Holden defines them, can provide shared terms of reference to articulate the value of the arts to citizens and to governments. They can help give depth and scope to a case for the arts and broaden our knowledge about how the arts are meaningful in different ways to different people in different contexts.

Alan Brown offered insight into his most recent research. He had begun to define a new language, with which to talk about public engagement, that helps to capture the diverse ways in which people connect to creative expression. Brown insists that the re-emergence of participatory arts is not only a result of advancing technologies, but connected to a larger societal resurgence of a “participation economy in which social connection eclipses consumption.”²⁵

²⁴ DEMOS. *Capturing Cultural Value*. Holden, John. 2004.

²⁵ The James Irvine Foundation. Brown and Novak-Leonard. *Getting In On the Act*, p. 6.

Brown proposes a framework for understanding arts engagement that includes both receptive and participatory forms of engagement. Receptive forms of engagement “activate the creative mind but do not involve creative expression on the part of the audience member.”²⁶ Examples include attending a concert, reading a book, or playing a video game.

Participatory forms of engagement are characterized by the level of participants’ creative control, defined as curatorial, interpretive, or inventive. They involve a sense of agency and action on the part of the participant. Taking a dance class, creating a playlist of your favourite songs, or painting a picture are all participatory forms of arts engagement.

Brown encourages arts organizations to take stock of the kinds of participatory practices they offer. Since research is increasingly confirming that arts participation positively affects attendance at live events, a shift in this direction will undoubtedly strengthen the overall ecology.

As I can attest, through my ongoing work with professional bankers in the creation of *Everyday Marvels*, there is a desire among non-professionals to participate in artistic experiences. This demand provides us with a viable way to expand our audiences. Indeed, my collaboration with RBC staff has already paid dividends. Participants, engaged in co-creating, are inspired by the process and invested in the outcome. As their skills improve and their commitment deepens, they become more curious about their own creative potential and naturally become advocates for creative experiences. By integrating art and creativity into their daily life they develop an appetite to experience all that art has to offer.

Expanding our audiences requires a different approach to the kind of programming offered by arts organizations and institutions. Integrating opportunities for participation as well as observation and consumption is essential. As Brown asserts “where previously arts organizations were looking to expand audiences through strategic marketing initiatives that leveraged new technologies and social media, today’s audience development problem is not a marketing issue, it’s a programming issue.”²⁷

Art at the centre of civic life

Despite the fears or concerns of some artists, creating public value and the pursuit of artistic development need not be mutually exclusive aims. At this juncture, the Canada Council for the Arts is signalling its desire to stimulate a conversation about change, including how individual arts practitioners and organizations can enhance their perceived value to the public and to communities. This discussion is timely and rooted in the need to expand,

²⁶ The James Irvine Foundation. Brown and Novak-Leonard. *Getting In On the Act*, p. 4.

²⁷ The James Irvine Foundation. Brown and Novak-Leonard. *Getting In On the Act*, p. 8.

rather than limit, the sector's capacity to be a driver of creative social economy through active engagement in the civic life of our communities.

As Canada Council Director Robert Sirman expressed in his keynote address at the Culture Days National Congress, "we [the arts sector] must take seriously the challenge of increasing our civic footprint." By reinvigorating public engagement as a core function and outcome of the Council's work, the professional arts sector has much to gain.

In his recent publication *Building Communities, Not Audiences*, community engagement specialist Doug Borwick suggests that, "The arts are not a product delivery industry. The arts are a personal relationship industry."²⁸ He makes a compelling case for why the long-term viability and relevance of the professional arts world depends on the ability of the sector to expand the base of the public being served by their creative offerings. "For the individual arts organizations, a community engagement agenda is inevitably a development strategy ... Where an arts organization is viewed as making significant contributions to the well-being of the community, there is a far broader spectrum of potential donors than is typical."²⁹

While attending Calgary's Arts Champions Congress last February, I was introduced to John Michael Schert, Executive Director of the Trey McIntyre Project based in Boise, Idaho. This contemporary dance company is a standout example of how increasing one's civic footprint leads to professional success. The Trey McIntyre Project has grown from a summer touring company in 2004, to becoming Boise's pre-eminent cultural ambassador, performing for over 100,000 people in 40 cities around the globe each year. In Schert's keynote address he said, "You can't just put art on stage, you have to be of value to your community. You have to be relevant."

The company offers significant programming for community engagement. Company members also meet regularly with civic leaders across industry sectors in Boise to work collaboratively toward city-building goals. Schert speaks about how the ability to translate creativity into something bigger than oneself is a tool that artists already have. Creative process is about empathy, intuition, generosity, and collaboration. It is not elitist; it's about relationships.

For artists and arts organizations, ensuring our work is relevant to the communities we aim to serve may require a more significant reimagining of program offerings than is comfortable. Yet as members of the Trey McIntyre Project can attest, enlarging our civic footprint by becoming active members of our communities can expand and deepen the relationships that help sustain us. Those unable to adapt are at risk of becoming increasingly irrelevant; those who

²⁸ Arts Engaged. *Building Communities, Not Audiences: The Future of the Arts in the United States*. Borwick, Doug. 2012, p. 26.

²⁹ Arts Engaged. *Building Communities, Not Audiences*. Borwick, p. 28.

can embrace new arts engagement strategies will leverage opportunities for growth.

Repositioning public value as a central tenet in public investment decision-making can help to instigate and provide support for the kind of change that is needed. I envision four ways in which public funders can lead this kind of positive change.

1. Within the assessment process, provide better balance between public value and arts development goals

The subjective ways in which artistic excellence is defined and assessed through the arm's-length peer-assessment process has no doubt played a role in distancing public interests in the conversation about artistic quality. In the current funding assessment construct, the "value" determined by peers has effectively contributed to arts development, but it has not equally addressed public relevance or community interest as a criteria of determining artistic quality in many core production-focused programs.

If new and deepened relationships with people and communities are critical to the future of the arts then conversations, connecting public value with the assessment of artistic excellence, are essential. As Borwick asks, "Why can real meaning in people's lives not be a criterion for excellence?"³⁰ Public funders are well poised to help reshape our collective understanding of excellence and better discern when and where stronger emphasis on public value must be placed in decision-making processes. For example, when investing in arts research and development, public value may hold little value in assessment conversations, ensuring that arts development goals are still an essential part of the public funder's role. However, when investing in production and dissemination, public value and community relevance should weigh more heavily into funding decisions.

2. Help artists and arts organizations develop participation-based arts programming

Despite growing evidence that today's audiences desire to engage and participate, many artists and arts organizations have become accustomed to working within an arts development-focused model. Our current model's attention to artistic excellence and arts development, as defined by peers from the industry, has proven to limit the ways in which value is created and articulated for communities, audiences, and other supportive stakeholders. This can mean the eventual improbability of further growth or sustainability.

³⁰ Arts Engaged. *Building Communities, Not Audiences*. Borwick, p. 35.

Growing interest in arts participation that extends well beyond passive consumption necessitates a reconsideration of program offerings made by professional artists and arts organizations. Public funders can play a role in supporting a necessary evolution in arts practice by helping the sector develop new competencies to facilitate participatory forms of engagement. Targeting public investment in the development of new skills will assist artists and organizations to create and design new offerings. This could include testing new ways of creating, designing new participation-based programs, exploring innovative means of facilitating online engagement, experimenting with presentation in untraditional venues, and others. While these kinds of activities are not generally ineligible in the current public funding system, they are not necessarily supported by targeted investment, nor are they a stated priority.

3. Develop new research on patterns of public arts engagement

Compared to sister countries, the lack of relevant public arts engagement research in Canada is painfully evident. Not only are Canadian research efforts dwindling as a result of the elimination of Statistics Canada's long-form census, but the nature and methodologies used to undertake research, as compared to similar countries, seem considerably outdated. New research that employs sophisticated methodologies could help us better define and substantiate what Holden calls the intrinsic, instrumental, and institutional value of the arts.

In particular, in order to inspire new arts practices and programs, there is a need for us to understand emergent patterns of public engagement in the arts. We also need to understand how Canadians ascribe value to art experiences. Public funders are well positioned to play a role, in collaboration with other organizations, agencies, or educational institutions, in uncovering new and relevant information about the attitudes and behaviours of Canadians as they relate to engagement in arts and cultural activities.

4. Build industry confidence through shared learning, exchange, and the chronicling of success

In addition to learning from research, artists and arts organizations would also benefit from sharing their own experiences about their attempts to adapt. Who is making new and different programmatic choices? What have been the outcomes of those choices? Change, without a clear vision, evokes fear and a competitive attitude. If the public funder can inspire a sense of community around the process of adaptive change, artists and organizations may be more courageous in their attempts to venture into new territory.

Beyond sharing success stories within the Canadian context, there is a growing body of documented case studies outside of Canada that can be looked to for inspiration and learning. (Alan Brown's work highlights many examples.)

The opportunity to begin tracking our own progress in Canada is essential if we are to learn from our own experiments and innovations. Arts service organization leaders, together with public funders, are well positioned to play a role in this area.

Embracing new perspectives on public arts engagement

As I make new connections with community through my own artistic pursuits, I continue to learn many lessons about how to better facilitate a process of creative engagement for audiences. It is an ongoing dialogue that builds bridges to and from my art. In the space between art and community, there is so much potential. Engaging audiences in new ways has been personally and professionally rewarding, offering me new perspectives about my own work and its impact beyond the stage.

If we agree, that in this new age of arts engagement building relationships must be the focus, then we need to help the sector build capacity while improving public relevance and impact. Given the obstacles, navigating change requires a patient approach — one that allows room for discussion, learning, experimentation, and recalibration within the arts sector. With the help of public funders, the arts sector can build capacity and expand its impact by focusing attention on creating new, more relevant and connected experiences for its audiences. This emerging rethink and reinvigoration of public arts engagement offers unprecedented opportunities for the arts sector to reassert its role as essential to the social fabric of the communities of which they are a part.

PART THREE

Creating an effective arts enterprise: Emerging business strategies and structural models

THE THIRD ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY

Artists need to be able to develop appropriate resourcing strategies, structural models, and ways of working that can effectively support their artistic activities.

In 2010, I had the pleasure of working with a group of savvy Toronto-based mid-career dance creators (the Alliance of Independent Mid-Career Dance Creators). The purpose was to identify what their common challenges were and to open a conversation about how to improve overall working conditions for independent artists. An in-depth survey of 14 artists uncovered some startling indicators that resonated well beyond this small focus group.

The study, titled *Stuck in the Middle*,³¹ revealed that the average Toronto-based, mid-career independent contemporary dance creator is 39, has worked professionally for 18 years, and earns \$18,130. 78% of these earnings come from dance-related sources. (The low-income cut-off for Canadian cities with populations over 500,000 is \$20,800.)³²

80% of surveyed artists were functioning on a by-project basis with a typical budget of about \$27,400 per cycle of activity. Half were operating as non-profits with charitable status; the other half as sole proprietors. In their last cycle of activity, 14 artists engaged a total of 194 individuals and paid out over \$357,000 in salaries and wages. Artists were volunteering time in virtually every aspect of their business. For every paid hour, an additional 36 minutes of volunteer time was required to realize a cycle of activity. Less than 50% of their time was spent on artistic activity.

This data paints a challenging portrait of today's artist, struggling to support his or her creative activities. Despite high levels of public funding as a

³¹ Alliance of Independent Mid-Career Dance Creators. *Stuck in the Middle: The Story of 14 Mid-Career Dance Creators*. Litzemberger, Shannon. 2010.

³² Hill Strategies Research. *A Statistical Profile of Artists in Canada*. Based on the 2006 Statistics Canada Census. 2009.

percentage of budget, these artists were still unable to promote and disseminate their work effectively across local, regional, and international markets. As one artist said, “Without operating funding, it can be extremely challenging to access the funds necessary to support adequate administrative and organizational support.”³³

Those working in the traditional charitable model were no better off than those functioning as sole proprietors. “I have larger and larger doubts,” one artist said, “whether the small company structure really benefits us, or if it is just a whole extra work load. Boards, though helpful in many ways, need managing, recruiting, catalyzing, upkeep and education ... there is not as much tangible payback as I would like.”

What was clear for all of the artists was that the hefty reliance on public funds inevitably caused a roadblock in their longer-term development. Growing a self-sufficient organizational structure with government seed money, as in decades past, was not viable. Nor was it possible to carry on without new capacity to find significant new revenue. They were at an impasse.

I believe the experience of these artists is a warning signal. If after nearly two decades a whole generation of dance creators hasn’t established a viable working model, in whose footsteps will the next generation follow? If we know the beaten path leads to an unsustainable future, how do we encourage today’s artists to forge new pathways to success?



Canadian public arts funders have, for over 50 years, supported and encouraged the building of independent, charitable institutions. In an earlier time this approach succeeded at developing a national body of talent and an infrastructure that facilitated the creation, production, and dissemination of quality artistic content in Canada.

Today, innovators among a new generation of artists are adopting a more collaborative, flexible, and interdependent mode of engaging in artistic activities. In the absence of company positions or development programs that provide real work experience for promising newcomers, there has been a dramatic rise in the number of independent artists and small-scale artist-led enterprises. For this generation, entering into the built infrastructure cultivated over the past 50-plus years is no longer a viable or likely career trajectory.

In essence, the artist has become a micro-business, designing a career through the resourceful application of a whole range of skills and talents. They are also often acting in roles that extend beyond their artistic talents. Aiming to fuel their projects through a process of self-organization they may take on the roles of

³³ Alliance of Independent Mid-Career Dance Creators. *Stuck in the Middle: The Story of 14 Mid-Career Dance Creators*. Litzenberger, Shannon. 2010, p. 23.

producers, fundraisers, administrators, project managers, and touring and outreach coordinators. Replacing necessary resources with passion and a do-it-yourself attitude can only continue for so long. Too often, it leads to an unsustainable working situation characterized by low wages, isolation, significant personal sacrifice, and minimal opportunities to advance.

Retooling existing capacity development programs to include support for a diversity of structures and working models could have a major impact for a growing contingent of artist entrepreneurs and small arts enterprises. Public funders could adapt programs to include support for short- and long-term art projects and activities, rather than exclusively support the creation and development of fixed organizational structures. Capacity building programs could also provide support for career development initiatives that focus on developing the individual arts enterprise. Building a profile, establishing an online presence, communicating with donors and patrons, securing partnerships and collaborations, developing new market opportunities, and exploring new revenue sources, for example, are all critical aspects of an artist's work.

Challenging old models

In *20 under 40: Re-Inventing the Arts and Arts Education for the 21st Century*, American theatre director and arts consultant Rebecca Novick offers a compelling article, *Please Don't Start Another Theatre Company! Next Generation Arts Institutions and Alternative Career Paths*. As a voice of the under-40 mid-career artist, Novick underscores a common misconception among artists entering the professional milieu. "My generation of theatre artists grew up on the stories of how our current crop of institutions were founded ... Why shouldn't my company be the next success story?"³⁴ She describes a crucial nexus for the field, the place where failure meets transformation.

As the title of her article suggests, the proliferation of theatre start-ups in the US over the past 15 years has caused considerable malaise in the industry. These companies are simply replicating the problems of more established theatres on a smaller scale. "Neither the field nor the next generation of artists is served by the unexamined multiplication of companies based on the same old model."

Having started her own theatre company early in her career, Novick reflects, "I wonder how much more powerful the productions might have been if we hadn't had to put so much effort into learning how to be nonprofit managers or how much more we might have discovered if we had applied the same creativity to organizational structure that we did to our art."³⁵ It's clear that organizations

³⁴ authorHOUSE. *20 Under 40: Re-inventing the Arts and Arts Education for the 21st Century*. Edited by Clapp, Edward P. 2010, p.65.

³⁵ authorHOUSE. *20 Under 40*. Edited by Clapp. p.67.

trying to copy an old model, without the same kind of access to start-up funds afforded to their predecessors, have a much smaller likelihood of success.

Novick describes a new paradigm where public arts funders focus on supporting quality content and talent rather than structures. They award funds to good ideas as a venture capitalist would. “Is this idea good? And is this person talented and competent enough to implement it?”³⁶ She references the helpful efforts of grant makers like Creative Capital³⁷ and Center for Cultural Innovation³⁸ that support individual artists with career development services. She also suggests modeling the work of organizations like Intersection for the Arts³⁹ and Springboard for the Arts⁴⁰ that incubate programs and training for artists and organizations.

In their 2012 report, *The Emerging Narratives in the Arts: A Special Report from ARTS Action Research*, New York-based authors Anne Dunning and Nello McDaniel concur. “The old notion that each artist or group of artists must build their own institution that would attract all the resources needed while keeping competing interests out ... is not only philosophically and culturally at odds with the way arts professionals choose to work today, but it represents an unsustainable economic model.”⁴¹

Their research on emergent arts practices through an initiative called *Theatres Leading Change*,⁴² has pinpointed some of the failings of the old model and highlighted fundamental flaws inherent from the outset. Based on the outcomes of the initiative’s pilot in New York City, Dunning and McDaniel offer four areas where the old model appears to be “broken.”

The Board

While board members are meant to provide strategic leadership for a non-profit arts organization, they are, in actuality, more likely engaged in a business they know little about. The growing pressures associated with underwriting the financial needs of the organization create considerable stress for board members who may be placing their energies into fundraising rather than relationship-building. Also, because boards are fiscally responsible for the organizational corpus, they tend to be risk averse in the context of a highly entrepreneurial and innovation-driven sector.

³⁶ authorHOUSE. *20 Under 40*. Edited by Clapp. p.72.

³⁷ www.creative-capital.org, accessed on March 7, 2013.

³⁸ www.cciarts.org, accessed on March 7, 2013.

³⁹ www.theintersection.org, accessed on March 7, 2013.

⁴⁰ www.springboardforthearts.org, accessed on March 7, 2013.

⁴¹ ARTS Action Research. *The Emerging Narratives in the Arts: A Special Report From ARTS Action Research*. Dunning, Anne and McDaniel, Nello. 2012.

⁴² *Theatres Leading Change* is currently active in Toronto with support from the Metcalf Foundation and other funders.

Sustainability

The notion that non-profits should somehow be moving toward earned revenue sustainability is fundamentally in conflict with the market failure paradigm in which non-profits work. Charitable organizations were not conceived to achieve stability through earned revenues, though private and public funders often provide time-limited resources with the assumption that supported programs or activities will eventually support themselves.

Growth and measures of success

The assumption that perpetual growth towards large, independent organizational structures results in stability and success is deeply flawed in today's cultural landscape. Systemically, many funders still ascribe value to growth and expansion, and they reward such value with greater levels of support.

Artistic lifecycles

Artists entering the field seem to be, more and more, in a “forever emerging” state. While there have been programs to support the emergence of new talent, increasingly there is nowhere for these artists to emerge to. Fewer positions are available within the existing infrastructure, and the resources available to sustain a career are increasingly limited.

Dunning and McDaniel caution that, if public funders ignore the emergence of new structures and practices, both individual organizations and the system as a whole will be at risk.

Likewise, in the UK, an organization called Mission Models Money (MMM) concludes that hundreds of important non-profit organizations are over-extended, under-capitalized and highly dependent on public sector grants for survival. “This scenario, whilst allowing survival, offers very little scope for fundamental transformation into more responsive, adaptive, sustainable mission-led businesses.”⁴³ MMM has discovered that there are many new methods of operation and new business models emerging, characterized by the growth of freelancers, facilitators, networkers, and producers. A growing desire to form strategic alliances, share services, and to collaborate is evident.

In the US, a similar conversation is underway. Richard Evans of EmcArts has taken great strides in exploring organizational innovation. “When before we were structured for growth, future success will mean being structured for

⁴³ Mission Models Money. *Towards a healthy ecology of arts and culture*. May 2007.

sustainability; growth capacity as a measure of success will be replaced by ‘adaptive capacity.’”⁴⁴

In his article *Entering Upon Novelty: Policy and Funding Issues for a New Arts Era*, Evans describes what he terms “next practices” in the arts. They include valuing relationships, lateral distribution of power, collaboration, multiple modes of public engagement, a focus on people and activities, flexible structures, and fluid financial models.

New ways of capitalizing arts enterprises

Over time, Canadian public arts funders at the provincial and national levels have set afoot many capacity development initiatives to support the healthy growth of new and emerging arts organizations, as well as to assist organizations in developing capacity at critical stages of their growth. Programs include Canada Council’s Flying Squad (replaced by the Leadership for Change program in October 2013), Ontario Arts Council’s Compass program, and the Canada Cultural Investment Fund at the Department of Canadian Heritage.

When viewed collectively, existing capacity development programs reveal a sharp focus on building administrative, financial, and governance capacity through the development of effective organizational systems. These systems are rooted primarily in the traditional organizational model and operating structure. To support new arts enterprises to work differently, public funders will need to adapt programs to become less fixed and more inclusive of evolving structural and working capacity development needs.

Research efforts in the US are at the fore of the global conversation on non-profit arts capitalization. In particular, America’s Nonprofit Finance Fund (NFF) is doing exceptional work to understand the nature of the non-profit arts marketplace. In a 2010 edition of *The Nonprofit Quarterly*,⁴⁵ NFF CEO Clara Miller distinguishes the operating conditions of the non-profit from the for-profit enterprise.

Non-profits are running two businesses: “the core, mission-focused business, and a second ‘subsidy’ business” that involves things like fundraising dinners, capital campaigns, endowment management, grant writing, and other creative income-generating solutions. These secondary activities require significant human and financial capital, though the public and private funders who contribute to arts organizations rarely want to contribute to these costs. They prefer to focus their investment on programming, core services, or special projects. Miller cautions, “funders can unintentionally contribute to the

⁴⁴ Grantmakers in the Arts. *Entering Upon Novelty: Policy and Funding Issues for a new Era in the Arts*. Richard Evans. GIA Reader Vol. 21 No. 3. Fall 2010, p.3.

⁴⁵ The Nonprofit Quarterly. *Collected Articles of Clara Miller*. Miller, Clara. 2010.

systematic under-capitalization of the sector — encouraging the growth of programs without providing for a commensurate growth in capacity.”⁴⁶

The NFF recently directed efforts at addressing what they term the “mis-capitalization” of non-profit arts organizations. In a 2011 article *Case for Change Capital in the Arts: Building Vibrant and Viable Cultural Organizations*, Rebecca Thomas and Rodney Christopher state that most arts organizations are struggling financially because they are “structured in ways that stymie their ability to propel and sustain their aspirations.”⁴⁷

Boston-based Technical Development Corp principal Susan Nelson describes how non-profit arts organizations, unlike for-profits, exist in a context of chaotic capital markets. It is not consumer behaviour alone that drives profitability and sustainability, but a complex combination of institutions, major donors, individuals, consumers, and government. She also highlights that risk capital is almost never available because potential funders are looking for a guarantee of success and arts organizations aren’t honest about the potential for failure associated with real innovation.

“There is not much reward to taking risks unless you succeed every time, which, of course, is not the nature of risk,”⁴⁸ Nelson says. She recommends that arts organizations and funders have more honest conversations about capitalization and that funders aim to promote reserves, reward surpluses, and recognize the nature of risk.

Nelson’s current research focuses on the relationship between capital structure and mission. In a 2009 report *Getting Beyond Breakeven: A Review of Capitalization Needs and Challenges of Philadelphia-Area Arts and Culture Organizations*, Nelson presents a new capitalization framework. This framework defines different types of capital (operating funds, working capital, operating reserve, capital replacement reserve, endowment, and risk capital) and helps to determine the proper scope and scale of capital structure through an examination of an organization’s time horizon (short, medium, and long-term), core business model drivers (artistic vision, audience dependent, facilities, and collections), and lifecycle stage (start-up, growth, decline, and renewal).⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Nonprofit Finance Fund (US). *The Four Horsemen of the Nonprofit Finance Apocalypse*. Clara Miller, May 2010, p. 9.

⁴⁷ Nonprofit Finance Fund. *Case for Change Capital in the Arts*. Thomas, Rebecca and Christopher, Rodney, with Sidford, Holly of Helicon Collaborative. 2011, p. 2.

⁴⁸ Nelson, Susan. Quoted from her presentation at *Creative Partnerships: Connecting Arts and Business*. Toronto. December 5, 2012.

⁴⁹ Technical Development Corp. *Getting Beyond Breakeven: A Review of Capitalization Needs and Challenges of Philadelphia-Area Arts and Culture Organizations*. Commissioned by The Pew Charitable Trust and the William Penn Foundation. Nelson, Susan. 2009.

Emerging ideas, early experiments

Several leading organizations at home and abroad are trailblazing their way through research, investment, and new initiatives, to help provide new direction, insight, understanding, and support for change.

In Australia, the Queensland Government is investigating the creation of a privately funded foundation for individual artists. It would recognize, foster, promote and celebrate their work, as well as provide career development support.

In an exploratory paper commissioned by the government titled, ***New Models New Money***⁵⁰ Peter Shergold of the Centre for Social Impact recommends establishing an independent foundation for the artist. It would enable artists to develop substantial practices, and contribute to the cultural, economic, and social well-being of Australia. Central to his recommendation is the need to find new ways of supporting individual artists who are “the research scientists of the creative economy.”⁵¹ *New Models New Money* suggests that supporting the divergent needs of various actors in the arts ecosystem, including micro-businesses and individual artists, requires a diversity of funding sources and approaches. A new foundation for the artist would “focus on the entire career path of artists — emerging, mid-career and established — and help them prosper.”⁵²

America’s ***Creative Capital*** is a national non-profit organization that provides integrated financial and advisory support to artists. Founded in 1999, it is the only national grant-making organization in the US with an open application process that supports individual artists on a multi-year basis. Creative Capital works in a long-term partnership with their grantees, providing the time and advisory services that are crucial to artistic and financial success. Over the course of a funded project they work with each artist to establish a range of external partnerships and partner with them directly to determine how funding and services can best help them achieve their goals.

In the US, initiatives like ***Theatres Leading Change*** (now also active in Toronto), are exploring, incubating, and documenting new working models. They are looking at how innovative small- and mid-scale theatre companies in New York are developing, producing, and disseminating works and how they engage in a range of partnerships and relationships.

Dunning and McDaniel have identified some common threads in their report: ***Emergent Phenomena: A Report on Theatres Leading Change New York***. Similar to the emergent structural qualities identified by Evans, these threads

⁵⁰ Queensland Government. *New Models New Money: A Foundation for the Artist. A proposal*. Shergold, Peter. Centre for Social Impact. Australia. 2011.

⁵¹ Queensland Government. *New Models New Money*. Shergold, p. 4.

⁵² Queensland Government. *New Models New Money*. Shergold, p. 8.

include a flexible approach to human resources, an increased focus on developing partnerships and relationships, a rethinking of relationships with board members and community partners, a new focus on audience relationships – including the potential of integrating audiences into the development of the work – expanding access to information and dialogue online, and a consideration for new shared platforms including shared multipurpose production venues and shared organizational infrastructure and services. In short, next generation working models are fluid and flexible, focus on people and relationships, and take advantage of collaborative platforms.

In Canada, organizations like **Centre for Social Innovation** (CSI) and **Artscape** are leading the way in collaborative workspace development and emerging social enterprise incubation. CSI's model of clustering like-minded socially focused organizations has brought together a growing membership representing missions from arts, environment, education, and social justice. Shared space and back office services lower the cost of running a business for individual tenants, while also providing them with value-added services such as access to board room space, a communal kitchen, green space, and programs that facilitate cross-sector networking.

As Canada's "leading practitioner in multi-tenant space development for the arts and culture sector,"⁵³ Toronto's Artscape is another strong example of collaborative physical infrastructure for arts creation, production, and entrepreneurship. Their projects are designed to build and leverage the local community's cultural assets and creative resources while serving as a catalyst for neighbourhood growth and transformation. Artscape's **Centre for Creative Sector Entrepreneurship** (set to open in 2015) will support the entrepreneurial capacity and business skills of artists, creative professionals, arts organizations, and small creative businesses.

Understanding that collaboration is key to emergent working practices, community level, service-based collaborative arts platforms can effectively support emerging arts enterprises. America's largest arts service organization, **Fractured Atlas**, recently developed free open-source ticketing and patron management software for independent artists and small organizations. Specifically designed for the cultural sector, **ATHENA Tix 1.0** can sell tickets, accept donations, manage patron records, and more. The goal eventually is to build a platform capable of managing all administrative aspects of cultural enterprises. Users can access the platform as is, or use the source code as the basis for building a customized platform.⁵⁴

⁵³ Toronto Artscape Inc. <http://www.torontoartscape.org/about-us>, accessed on March 7, 2013.

⁵⁴ Fractured Atlas Blog. <http://www.fracturedatlas.org/site/blog/2009/12/08/announcing-athena-tix-a-new-open-source-ticketing-system/> accessed on March 7, 2013.

Supporting next generation arts enterprises

To encourage healthy evolution in the arts, a major shift in how we support the development of artists and arts enterprises is needed. A focus on collaboration, new working models, sustainable financial practices, and the health of the individual artist is essential. Building on the knowledge, work, and experience of innovative organizations and initiatives, such as Theatres Leading Change, Centre for Social Innovation, and Artscape, Canada is well positioned to explore new avenues to invest in arts enterprises.

I believe there are six ways in which we can provide the resourcing strategies, structural models, and ways of working to help us define a new arts economy. They are:

1. Provide change capital

If existing arts organizations operating in traditional programmatic and structural modes are to shift assumptions, discontinue previous practices, and find “new pathways to mission fulfillment,”⁵⁵ as Evans suggests, then public funders could provide a unique one-time investment to assist organizations in undertaking this systematic process of innovative organizational transformation.

The Nonprofit Finance Fund calls this kind of support “Change Capital.” It is an investment in an organization to: 1) support improvements in the efficiency or quality of its programs or operations, or 2) support growth, downsizing, or other adjustments to the size and scope of the organization. It essentially enables an organization to better support its costs with reliable, recurring revenue.⁵⁶

2. Encourage and reward sustainable financial practices

Arts organizations and funders need to have more honest conversations about capitalization. Funders could aim to promote reserves, reward surpluses, and recognize the nature of risk in order to better support healthy and sustainable organizational practices. The concept of “right-sizing” also presents an opportunity for both arts organizations and funders to recalibrate activity and structure with available resources. Being realistic about the cost of doing business is an important starting point.

⁵⁵ Grantmakers in the Arts. *Entering Upon Novelty: Policy and Funding Issues for a new Era in the Arts*. Richard Evans. GIA Reader Vol. 21 No. 3. Fall 2010, p.3.

⁵⁶ Nonprofit Finance Fund. *Case for Change Capital in the Arts*. Thomas, Rebecca and Christopher, Rodney, with Sidford, Holly of Helicon Collaborative. 2011.

3. Support organizational decline and legacy preservation

A major renewal in the lifecycle of arts organization leadership is imminent. In particular, artistic succession issues are prevalent in organizations led by founders whose companies bear their name. Renewal within the arts ecosystem cannot only take the form of replacing people within existing structures; it also needs to replace some of the existing structures with new ones. Public funders can play a critical role in maintaining this ecological balance by supporting new growth as well as responsibly disinvesting in organizations and programs that fail to be adequately relevant and valued, that have lived out their intent and purpose, or have intentionally signalled their own devolution. In the context of organizational sun-setting, a different kind of support is required — one that assists in acknowledging and celebrating contribution to the field, provides the means to preserve legacy, and accords respect to the artists and arts professionals involved.

4. Reorient capacity development programs to support diverse structural and administrative working models

One of the ways public arts funders can begin to support new arts development is to recognize that a defined organizational structure is not a precondition to successful growth and sustainability. Arts enterprises can and do include individuals as well as various types of organizations, partnerships, and collaborative groups — all capable of undertaking a diverse set of activities in unique ways within the arts ecosystem. A new set of criteria will be required, therefore, to assess potential development. Equipping new arts enterprises with tools and resources to discover, learn, and create new pathways to fulfill their missions will begin to uncover a multiplicity of new models capable of success.

5. Provide new, more substantive means of support to individual artists at key career stages

Another way the public arts funder can support a new generation of development is to consider new measures that support individual artists along a career path. In Canada, support for individual artists could involve periodic investments in the form of fellowships, awards, career accelerator grants, sabbaticals, or capacity development funds. Such grants could be allocated on a limited basis, accessible at critical or transitional moments in the lifecycle of an artist's career. Some of these types of grants already exist, but to a very limited extent and arguably not in a way that significantly addresses capacity development for the individual artists, particularly at the early and later stages.

6. Prioritize support for collaborative platforms and working models

New collaborative spaces and platforms hold considerable potential to support a new generation of arts enterprises. Metcalf Innovation Fellow Jane Marsland’s recent publication, *Shared Platforms and Charitable Venture Organizations: A powerful possibility for a more resilient arts sector*, outlines three distinct models of shared platforms that she advocates “could make a significant impact on improving the health of the arts sector.”⁵⁷ Shared spaces and platforms catalyze innovation, promote exchange and shared learning, facilitate a sense of community, and create efficiencies in the use of public funds directed at current and future infrastructure development needs. It is in our collective interest to invest in communes rather than castles, to promote sharing rather than competition, and to embrace diversity, new partnerships, and associations as important preconditions of innovation and industry progress.

⁵⁷ Marsland, Jane. *Shared Platforms and Charitable Venture Organizations: A powerful possibility for a more resilient arts sector*. Toronto, Metcalf Foundation, June 2013, p. 6.

Conclusion

As I immersed myself over the past three years in the complexities of arts support systems and their relationship to contemporary practice, I gained tremendous insight into how we might better support future arts development in Canada. This time of reflection has allowed me to understand better not only where we are as a sector, but how far we've come. It has given me a chance to seek out the bright spots of innovation and leadership and to look far into the horizon with a great imagination for what our future might hold. It has also fuelled experiments in my own artistic practice and helped me appreciate the great potential of a new generation of artists emerging on the scene.

There is no doubt that Canada's emerging generation of arts practitioners is highly inventive, diverse, connected and entrepreneurial. They are crossing the lines between disciplines and art forms. They are taking their work off traditional stages and into communities. They are engaged in flexible collaborations to support their artistic activities. Despite enormous challenges, they are breaking convention in order to reinvent our collective identity.

But we cannot rest assured that the artist can persevere regardless of how impoverished the conditions. We need to realign our arts policy mindset and funding practices to support a new generation of arts development in Canada. To do this will require collaborative action on the part of the arts community and its funders.

To support artistic innovation, I recommend evaluating our discipline-based funding frameworks and assessment processes in consideration of industry-focused models. I believe industry-focused models are better able to encourage new artistic ideas and art forms and support sector-wide ecological conditions as they shift and evolve. I believe there is also an opportunity to improve upon our existing peer-assessment model. Cross-disciplinary panels, and the potential integration of other types of skilled individuals into the assessment process, are options to test and learn from.

I also recommend repositioning public value as a central tenet in public investment decision-making. Providing better balance between public value and arts development goals will encourage the arts sector to strengthen relationships with individuals, publics, and communities. As artists and arts organizations rethink the relationship between art and the public, support is needed to develop new public engagement competencies through experimentation, adaptation, and change. Funders can play a role in facilitating dialogue, collaborating on the

development of new research, and supporting the discovery and exchange of new and effective public arts engagement practices.

To support the development of new structures, models, and ways of working already exemplified by an emergent generation of arts practitioners and enterprises, we need public funding practices and programs that are less fixed and more inclusive of evolving structural and working capacity development needs. Supporting working principles that encourage collaboration and the elimination of hierarchical power structures, that focus on people and activities and relationships, that support flexible and adaptive structures and fluid financial models, is key to next generation development.

As we aim to realign funding policies and programs with emergent working practices, a new set of questions will help redefine and assess viability, capacity, and potential growth. These questions must be rooted in the values of a new mindset, one that is focused on the potential for excellence and artistic innovation, the quality and relevance of relationships with people, communities, and publics, and the appropriateness and viability of working models and structures.

Having come to the end of this particular investigation, I am charged with new energy and ideas that I believe can transform the arts in Canada. However, identifying solutions to some of our sectors most pressing challenges is only the first step in reimagining a new future. My hope is that the ideas contained in *Choreographing our Future* will spark a robust and informed debate about how we shape our collective future. To move forward, the conversation must shift beyond ruminations about the many obstacles and challenges we face, to a place where we can contemplate and take action toward a major systemic transformation that will redefine how the arts are supported in Canada.

To do this we need to abandon the comforts of the status quo and overcome our fear of an unknown future. It is not our intellect that will propel us forward, but our courage. We must be willing to erase the line that separates artist and institution, that polarizes the traditional from the contemporary, that pits disciplines of practice against each other, and isolates generations and cultural groups. In this new age of the arts — this newly celebrated creative economy — I am optimistic about the possibilities for artists, arts organizations, and funders to work together as creative innovators, as facilitators of engagement in creative life, and as ambassadors of a healthy, thriving, vibrant arts sector.

Choreographing our Future

Strategies for supporting next generation arts practice

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