

# **LEADING COMMUNITY ARTS INTO THE FUTURE**

**A Report Prepared for  
Community Arts Ontario  
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## **Acknowledgement**

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This Report will discuss the following seven “foci” as outlined in the CSIF Proposal:

- Analyze the impact of community arts councils (ACs) in Ontario
- Develop closer links and potential new partnerships with municipalities
- Research current practices and existing models developed by other community arts council programs nationally and abroad
- Research policy objectives & advocacy strategies adapted by other not-for-profit organizations
- Explore the relationship between ACs and Community Arts Ontario’s (CAO’s) varied stakeholders
- Develop an action plan to be implemented by the various community arts councils and community based organizations across Ontario.

The author has been provided with research materials and resources on which most of the information in this report is based.

In reviewing the record of meetings as well as surveys with ACs among CAO’s membership, it is clear that many ACs recognize for themselves the need to respond to certain realities of operating in the current social context. In meetings consultations sponsored by CAO, ACs have identified the following as issues:

- Diminished funding & resources (particularly a lack of core funding).
- Lack of recognition and value for the work ACs do.
- A need for greater advocacy and communication about how ACs contribute to their communities.<sup>1</sup>

While the issues identified above suggest that ACs are being impacted by other groups, this report and action plan will focus on options for CAO’s membership in this current reality and will not critique other groups and sectors. The following sections discuss some of the issues that arise from the information gathered through the above-mentioned surveys and other sources.

### **Concepts of “Community Arts”:**

It is clear from the literature review conducted for this report that theorists and practitioners around the English-speaking world and beyond increasingly see the definition and understanding of “community arts” as fundamental to developing an organization’s common understanding and vision as well as to maintaining relevancy, creativity and influence. Certainly, relevancy to the community is one criterion that many funders look for in determining the allocation of public monies. Many terms are being suggested as an alternative to community arts (e.g., community cultural development) in order to emphasize the concept that “community arts” should be

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<sup>1</sup> Community Arts Council Caucus, Saturday May 15, 2004, minutes.

understood as both a tool and a product of community development. Inherent in this understanding is that cultural programs can play a role in addressing social problems.

This report will not compare and contrast definitions of community arts or explore the meanings and limitations of terminology. However, it is clear that the scope, focus and priority of a community organization's work can be influenced by concepts of both "art" and "community".

### **Concepts of "Community" and the Implications**

In *Education for Changing Unions* the word, "community" is considered a verb.

For us community means building connections between people for a common purpose... What we have in mind is a community based on a sense of common humanity and a bond of shared experience and values that goes beyond tactical agreement on a particular political priority or social struggle. This is a community forged by deep listening to difficult differences in order to build more trust and shared power.<sup>2</sup>

The Aboriginal worldview offers another concept of "community". In *Rotinosoni* (Iroquois) communities every event or gathering -- ceremonial, social or business -- is opened with what is known as the Thanksgiving Address. The Thanksgiving Address is normally delivered orally by an Elder who will stand and take as much time as necessary to offer thanks to all "living"<sup>3</sup> creatures (plants, animals, waters, stars, sun, moon, etc.) for their contribution to providing two-leggeds (human beings) with food, clothing, shelter, medicine and everything else that is required for healthy living. In *Anishinabe* gatherings the term "All My Relations" is used to acknowledge and honour a concept of extended family that does not stop with living blood relatives but includes ancestors, the generations to come and, all other "life" on the planet and beyond.

Furthermore, Aboriginal values see diversity within a community not as something one must learn to tolerate, or even something that enhances life experiences, but as necessary to human survival because we are all connected and interdependent.

Mother Earth and all her children teach us that diversity is necessary to our health and well-being. You do not see the trees insisting that they all bear the same fruit. You do not see the fish declaring war against those who do not swim. You do not see corn blocking the growth of squash and beans. What one

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<sup>2</sup> Burke, Bev; Geronimo, Jojo; Martin, D'Arcy; Thomas, Barb; Wall, Carol *Education for Changing Unions*. Between the Lines Press. 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Aboriginal concepts of "life" are more inclusive than Eurocentric definitions and are based in a spiritual ideology that provides a conceptual framework for understanding and interpreting the world.

plant puts into the soil, another takes. What one tree puts into the air another creature breathes. What one being leaves as waste another considers food. Even death and decay serve to nurture new life. Every one of Mother Earth's children co-operates so that the family survives.<sup>4</sup>

At the other end of the spectrum, organizations that focus on serving a membership are limiting their capacity to respond to the broader needs of community artists, thus limiting their membership, growth potential and funding sources -- not to mention limiting the degree to which they remain relevant and beneficial to that broader community.

Thus, we can see that concepts of "community" have implications for community development work including community cultural development. An assessment of who and what comprises the community, as well as acknowledging and appreciating the diversity within, will certainly have a subsequent impact on identifying needs as well as achieving consensus on vision, mandate and objectives.

Certainly there must be a limit to what an organization can do and whom it can serve. No organization can be all things to all people (not to mention plants and animals). However, there needs to be some way of acknowledging, celebrating and coveting diversity as a way of better enabling an organization to serve the community in which it operates. Even economic development strategist Richard Florida, who is preoccupied with seeing art and culture as key to a community's economic well being, recognizes that embracing diversity and marginalized communities is a key component of community development.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, those who are concerned with the relationship between cultural activities and economic development note that, "New organizations, coalitions and movements – from political action committees to environmental coalitions, social justice organizations, and cultural entities..." are one of the factors that attract "creatives" into a community.<sup>6</sup> One can extrapolate and suggest that the diversity of ideas, orientations, ages, cultures, etc. as well as social activism can enhance organizational creativity and consequently broaden its support and resource base.

### **Concepts of Arts & Implications**

ACs well understands the limitations of defining "art" narrowly and focusing on "professionals" to the exclusion of developing artists. In fact, ACs are often among the loudest voices protesting the OAC's<sup>7</sup> and CCA's<sup>8</sup> criteria in this regard. They also

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<sup>4</sup> Amadahy, Zainab. "A Perspective on Diversity", Arts On: A Publication of Community Arts Ontario. Spring 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Bulick, Bill; Coletta, Carol; Jackson, Colin; Taylor, Andrew; Wolff, Steven. "Cultural Development in Creative Communities", *Monograph*, Americans for the Arts. November 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Ontario Arts Council

<sup>8</sup> Canada Council for the Arts

recognize how “art” is integrated into every facet of daily life and thus cannot be conceptually separated from social and community development.

This concept can also be illustrated by indigenous African worldviews exemplified by the Dogon, located in what is now Senegal. The Dogon people have no word for “art” in their original language. What Europeans later considered to be works of “art”, “cultural artifacts” or forms of artistic expression (e.g., dance & music) were not performed by “professionals” for an “audience”, displayed, bought, sold or owned. Rather, what we know as “art” was integrated into every facet of Dogon life, also based on a spiritual ideology. Visual art, crafts, music, dance, etc. were functional; had a purpose. They invoked ancestral spirits, protected, healed, empowered leadership, recorded history, educated, and passed on cultural values and more.

While most ACs are very open in their definitions of what constitutes “art”, there are different practices being employed to integrate art into daily life. The role ACs play in facilitating that integration also varies. For example, notions of how “professionals” or “practitioners” work with communities, non-professionals and/or non-practitioners vary greatly in practice and theory. While there are a number of projects that are planned and implemented with significant community consultation and participation there are also still organizations that do not incorporate broad community participation or unwittingly limit it in some way, resulting in varying levels of success. The frustration inherent in these varying notions was also manifested during the research phase of the Cultural Mapping Project when some ACs provided examples of failed attempts to collaborate with, recruit from and/or incorporate the participation of diverse communities; professional and otherwise.

Survey responses indicated that ACs often engage in activities that promote networking between “artists and the public”. In addition, they will often play a major role in marketing and promoting “the arts” within whatever they define to be their community. Professional development for artists or their organizations is another common activity. While these are necessary and useful activities it is not clear that such activities, though they may satisfy a membership or an established network, actually illustrate the impact on the quality of life of a community. Collecting information to enable an assessment of ACs’ roles in their communities was carried out by such methods as surveying memberships or collecting feedback from participants in above activities. Unfortunately, this methodology, regardless of the responses, does not sufficiently demonstrate an AC’s impact on community. In fairness, this does not mean that a community’s quality of life is NOT being impacted; simply that this cannot be definitively determined from the above activities or assessment tools.

Herein lies one of the main challenges for many ACs. While ACs believe they are relevant to and reflect their communities this is not always obvious to funders and potential new participants. The methods by which “relevancy” and “reflecting communities” are normally demonstrated in other sectors are not always employed by AC’s. Methods used by community service organizations to demonstrate that they are addressing community needs include participant feedback, holding community consultations, evaluating collaborations and

partnerships, conducting needs assessments and undertaking program/service evaluations that include participant and non-participant feedback, consultations with other community organizations, as well as quantifiable statistics and an assessment of whether and how objectives were met. Objectives themselves include broadening participation in terms of numbers and diversity at all levels of organizational activities from decision-making to implementation.<sup>9</sup>

Arguments that limited resources do not enable small organizations to conduct such comprehensive activities are not persuasive because tools for doing so can be quite informal and integrated into whatever activities and services are already being provided. In addition, such projects can form the basis of collaborations and partnerships with other groups inside and outside of the arts sector, thus increasing the capacity to access resources. Furthermore, studies, needs assessments and reports prepared in other sectors can also be very informative, meaning that ACs themselves do not necessarily have to undertake the work but make themselves aware of work that has already been done.

Arguments that ACs cannot respond to the needs of the entire community but only parts of it will be quite logically met with “then why should they be publicly funded with tax dollars”? That isn’t to say, for example, that the CNIB<sup>10</sup> should broaden its mandate to serve people who are not visually impaired. However, it should be held accountable for ensuring its services are relevant to, accessible to and incorporate the input of visually impaired people of diverse ethnicities, classes, genders, ages, etc. that comprise Canada. Likewise the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples in Toronto must be able to incorporate the input and address the service needs of the of the Spanish-speaking community in all its diversity including various ethnicities, nationalities, immigration statuses, citizenship histories, ages, disabilities, sexual orientations, etc.

It is the responsibility of publicly funded programs and services outside the arts sector to demonstrate the impact their activities have on improving the quality of life for individuals and groups within their community. In the “community arts” sector, it is argued, this should go well beyond concepts of audience development or outreach for marketing purposes, promoting artists and their organizations, or training individuals so that they can become better “professionals”.<sup>11</sup>

Examples of activities in which community arts is both a process and a product of community development are varied. At the 2003 CAO conference participants heard from Mexican artist Sergio Valdez Ruvalcaba who spoke of a mural project for young people in a neighborhood of the capital city infamous for its gang wars, drug trade and general violence.<sup>12</sup> Not only did the mural project allow young people to experience producing a work of art but provided them with opportunities to:

- Learn and develop a sense of pride in their history as a community dating back to pre-colonial times.

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<sup>9</sup> Appendix I contain a program evaluation template that is often followed by community organizations in other sectors to determine their impact on the communities they serve and ensure that their activities serve community needs.

<sup>10</sup> Canadian National Institute for the Blind

<sup>11</sup> *Creative Community: The Art of Cultural Development*

<sup>12</sup> Valdez Ruvalcaba, Sergio. *Community Mural Production, Learnings from Latin America: Community Arts / Popular Communications Workshops*. Kicking it up a Notch. Community Arts Ontario Conference. May 2003.

- Develop interpersonal and project management skills through historical research (including collecting oral histories), joint planning, budgeting, financial management, reporting, etc.
- Interact with and share issues of concern with older generations.
- Analyze, interpret and advocate on behalf of their community.
- Constructively assert their cultural, class and youth identities.
- Connect their experiences, challenges and development issues to the global, national and local context.

Mr. Valdez coordinated a similarly successful project in 2000 at the Scarborough Mission here in Ontario among a much more diverse and multilingual group of youth.

Sudbury's Myths & Mirrors (a CAO member) has sponsored several projects with clear objectives of engaging street-involved youth and other marginalized groups in that community using different disciplines as both a process of creating an artistic product as well as enabling participants to empower themselves through opportunities to acquire transportable skills, experiences and networks.

Ottawa's *The Mechanics of Gauging a Trade* enabled people engaged in different unions and trades, sometimes competitive and antagonistic, to interact, share and work out differences while creating a sculpture.<sup>13</sup>

In the 1980s the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples implemented the "Voces" project aimed at enabling street involved youth of Latin American heritage to explore issues of relevance to their lives while developing leadership and educational skills through popular theatre. While the project received no arts funding it did receive City of Toronto funding for AIDS/HIV education, domestic violence prevention and substance abuse prevention. Some of participants from this project are still in contact with its Coordinator and continue to testify to the impact it had on changing their lives. Thus, they are currently involved in various activities supporting youth and community development either on a volunteer basis or through their employment.

The challenge for ACs and other community arts organizations is to BE relevant and essential to a community as well as to DEMONSTRATE that they are relevant and essential. If a community perceives an organization as necessary to its well-being it will not idly stand by when that organization is experiencing difficulties. When Desh Pardesh "died" a number of years ago, due in part to lack of financial resources, the South Asian artists' community cared enough about some of the organization's programming that they continued to implement it, most notably the annual festival. Some years later a new organization (South Asian Visual Artists Collective) was born with a new structure, vision and mandate. SAVAC currently serves much of the aspirations of the same community that Desh served. Thus, the community was able to demonstrate to funders that there was a need for such an organization and that it served a useful social purpose. Many of the same artists and activists who were involved in Desh Pardesh now play a role in SAVAC while there is still considerable room for young and emerging artists to actively

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<sup>13</sup> Orton, Elizabeth. Transforming and Healing Communities through Art: An Analysis of Community-Based Art in Canada. Carleton University, Ottawa. March 1999.

participate. Furthermore, SAVAC has successfully initiated projects that engage other communities-of-colour.

When one of the buildings of an Aboriginal health centre in Toronto was gutted by fire other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations, inside and outside of Toronto, supported its reconstruction because they recognized the value to the community of the programs and services delivered at that site.

An organization that has a good relationship with its community, is comprised of diverse community members and is responsive to the needs and aspirations of that community will always be recognized and valued. Consequently, the case for support of one type or another will always be strong and persuasive.

### **Organizational Development :**

Organizational development is an issue ACs must always confront; the challenge is ongoing. Organizational development should comprise a number of activities including:

- Leadership recruitment, maintenance and education.
- Ongoing reviews and necessary adjustments to the organization's strategic plan.
- Periodic reviews and revisions of vision, mission, mandate, policy and structure.
- Managing constant change.

The impetus for change in a community organization comes from changes in the communities they serve and in which they operate. Communities are constantly in flux and it is important that community organizations monitor the consequent changing needs for cultural services and programming in order to maintain their relevancy, creativity and effectiveness.

Some of the changes we have seen in Ontario over the last several years include:

- An ever-increasing diversity of ethno-cultural groups impacting on a variety of communities across the province (and not just in the large urban centers of the south).
- First Nations and Aboriginal communities reclaiming their traditional as well as evolving forms of cultural expression as a way of recovering from the history of genocide and assimilation, as well as asserting their right to sovereignty.
- Communities of Muslims, South Asians, Middle Easterners and Africans stigmatized by 9-11 increasingly using forms of cultural expression and the arts to raise awareness and counter discrimination, ignorance and hate.
- The continued emigration of young people and families from rural regions and small towns.
- The amalgamation of neighborhoods into urban centers imposed by the province despite community concerns regarding the loss of identity and culture.
- An increase in collaborations and partnerships between and among people-of-colour, newcomer and Aboriginal communities.

- Communities of people with disabilities raising awareness and pressuring for greater access to cultural and arts programs.
- Downloading of responsibilities from federal and provincial levels of government to municipalities.

No community in the province has been left untouched by these changes. Furthermore, every community within the province has experienced these changes in unique ways. Subsequent responses have also been unique. Nevertheless, there are still some common experiences and wisdom that can be shared among communities.

It helps to maintain and emphasize organizational values that see change firstly as inevitable and secondly as an opportunity to expand, grow and develop. It is important for organizational culture to value the process of monitoring changes in the communities in which they work so that the organization can change to respond to community needs. This value seems inherent to a “community” arts organization, especially one accepting funds from any level of government. It also seems logical for an organization that genuinely wants its activities to benefit a community. Thus, an ongoing process of assessing community needs as well as appropriate responses should be formalized in all community organizations including those involved in arts.

Leadership is generally aware that change is an ongoing component of organizational existence as much as it is a characteristic of communities. Nevertheless, even the most accomplished leader is sometimes unprepared and lacking the resources to deal with organizational change. In addition, when inevitable change occurs, leadership may greet it with a sense of fear and trepidation. Thus, “managing” change sometimes becomes an exercise in denying the need, blaming others (particularly funders) for diminished organizational capacity, blocking, controlling and generally impeding progress.

Leaders must learn how to identify the need for change, create new and more comprehensive visions in response to the need for change and, interpret these to organizational stakeholders, funders as well as potential new participants. Likewise, it is also important to understand the basis of fears that arise concerning change so that these can be addressed and processes can be managed in a way that is safe for discussion and problem solving. Furthermore, it is important to anticipate and prepare for the inevitability that conflict and tension will arise when an organization is in the process of change and that this is not necessarily problematic, though it is always uncomfortable. A diversity of perspectives, experiences and emotional reactions to any issue can contribute to comprehensive and effective resolutions. At the same time, there may emerge individual stakeholders who will not share an organization’s transformed vision and mandate. The transformation process is facilitated when this is acknowledged and accepted without judgment, by the organization as well as the individuals involved.

For example, a director who is only interested in furthering the needs of professional theatre companies should probably not continue on the Board of an organization that has democratically decided to serve popular theatre groups. It would be an obstacle to organizational growth and development, not to mention a source of frustration for everyone concerned, if this director stayed on to press for a reversal to the change of mandate and/or to make decisions based on the

needs of groups the AC no longer serves. Neither the organization's nor the individual director's objectives would be served in this event.

While most organizational leaders would not argue with any of the above, the record clearly indicates many organizations are nevertheless struggling to implement these concepts. This was evident during the research stage of the Cultural Mapping Project when some ACs asked for CAO's help in building relationships with diverse community groups. In addition, some ACs were unaware of community arts activities and groups operating in their geographic sphere of influence and thus had little or no idea of the needs in their "community" and how to respond to them.

There are a variety of litmus tests to determine how well organizations are responding to the needs of their communities and meeting their mandates: contrasting the diversity of leadership with the diversity of the community, analyzing organizational growth in terms of membership and service units, determining whether needs assessments are part of strategic planning processes, exploring the extent to which needs assessments and program evaluations involve actors outside of the organization's established networks, etc..

There is also merit to adopting concepts of healthy organizational lifespan that include birth, childhood, adolescence, maturity, ageing and death. For example, in academia NGO<sup>14</sup> business management programs are teaching about the "8-curve" model of illustrating the cyclical nature of organizational development in which organizations and parts of organizations experience birth, struggle, peaks, declines and rebirths in a never-ending cycle over their lifetimes. In the Aboriginal worldview the Medicine Wheel paradigm teaches us that nothing lasts forever and nothing should. Even "passing on" is seen as part of a healthy life process that contributes to ongoing renewal and growth. Every aspect of life is cyclical. Likewise organizations and the programs and services they offer must go through cyclical processes that start with birth and end with death in order to appropriately respond to changes dictated by a constantly shifting context.

## **Contextual Analysis & Opportunities**

This section of the report will deal with potential opportunities for ACs to broaden and maintain their support. As noted above, CAO has sponsored two meetings with ACs to identify concerns. At the May 2004 meeting participants recognized the need for further meetings to develop and implement action plans addressing these concerns. It is hoped that the information presented below will be helpful in upcoming discussions.

### **Municipalities**

While downloading has often translated into decreased resources systemically, there are those who suggest it may contain opportunities. A workshop delivered by Ken Doherty & Dr. Greg Baker at CAO's 2004 conference "The Grand Gathering" suggested that the recent downloading of cultural programming onto municipalities represented an opportunity for community arts proponents. In fact, municipalities around the province

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<sup>14</sup> Non Government Organizations.

are holding workshops and presentations aimed at enabling organizations and arts activists to better lobby and negotiate their way through local bureaucracies to get their messages through to decision makers.

Though there is always the suspicion that theories which see arts and culture as integral to economic development and tourism are those that drive municipal arts and recreational programs, it appears that one cannot generalize about decision-makers. Municipalities are increasingly seeing arts and culture as an important quality of life issue and appreciate the impact it can have on resolving social issues. ACs can play a role in educating decision-makers and supporting leadership that already understands and supports community arts. While ACs should ideally be regularly assessing the cultural policies and practices of their municipalities, it is clear that this is an opportune moment. AC's should begin immediately setting goals and making plans to impact municipal policies and plans.

### **Outside the Sector**

As mentioned above, there have been examples of arts groups partnering with labour, activist or community service organizations to implement community arts programming. Such projects have received funding from non-arts sources because their social value is understood. While it can be argued that these types of collaborations tend to be project based, what they do over the long term is build broader community awareness and support of community arts programming and the organizations that deliver them, thus creating the potential for support in areas of advocacy and lobbying when it becomes necessary. The following examples are only a sampling of many from across the province.

The Workers Art and Heritage Centre in Hamilton regularly partners with ethno-cultural and labour organizations to implement community arts programming. It has labour representatives on its Board, which is also ethno-culturally diverse. Mayworks hosts an annual festival in Toronto in partnership with labour organizations. Mayworks has policies and practices that ensure its activities involve working people who are representative of Toronto's ethno-cultural diversity at every level. Both organizations receive funding from labour and non-government sources.

The *Centre Culturel Louis Hermon* and the Chapleau Arts Council, though they are mandated to serve the local Francophone community, regularly partner with the local band councils and Anglophone organizations (such as the school) to carry out regular programming that serves to address social and environmental issues. These organizations receive in kind support and funding from non-arts sectors.

The Sioux Lookout Anti-Racism Committee (SLARC) partners with the local museum, Indian Friendship Centre and other community groups to sponsor an annual music festival as well as deliver arts and community development programming throughout the year. Though SLARC sees itself primarily as youth organization promoting diversity and inclusion, most of their programming is cultural and has social goals. SLARC's work

illustrates the integration of arts and community development, which is only conceptually and artificially separated.

The Sam Gindin Chair at Ryerson University regularly contributes to projects and programming that integrates education, activism, community arts and community building. Among them was a January 2004 project entitled *Strangers at Home* organized by Project Threadbare, SALDA, The Coalition in Support of Indigenous Sovereignty and the Toronto Social Forum. *Strangers at Home* explored the common issues of South Asian communities and Aboriginal Canadians through film, spoken word and musical performances as well as discussion. What was anticipated as a small marginal event drew several hundred people from Toronto's diverse ethno cultural communities. Not only was a similar event organized in follow up to the World Social Forum, but the participants and organizers of these events continue to work together and have joined each other's organizations. The Toronto Social Forum subsequently made a commitment to incorporate a community arts component to all of their activities. This example serves to illustrate a shift in thinking for at least one organization as they have come to recognize the power of community arts to impact people's lives.

Once again we see that recognizing community arts as a vehicle for connecting communities and enabling them to work together on issues of common concern has the potential for broadening support and ensuring decision-makers the relevancy of such programs and the organizations necessary to implement them.

While no community organization ever has enough financial resources, it is clear that there are some very creative strategies being implemented in partnership with community to ensure the delivery of community arts programming. Thus, we continue to see the importance of staying on top of changing demographics and community issues.

### **The "Professional" Factor**

For geographically remote ACs as well as for small community arts organizations, the criteria of employing "professional artists" continues to be a source of frustration for groups seeking OAC or CCA funding. While there is some funding for emerging individual artists, there is even less funding for emerging and small cultural development organizations. It is argued that the economies and populations of small towns, rural areas, reserves and remote northern communities do not normally support professional artists but rather part time artists and practitioners. Thus, local arts organizations are forced to import "professionals" for projects in order to meet funding criteria and even this does not satisfy the need for core administrative support. This issue was raised often during the research phase of the Cultural Mapping Project.

De-ba-juh-ma-jig Theatre, whose home base is the Wikwemekong First Nation community on Manitoulin Island and the McDonald's Corners & Elphin Recreation & Arts Centre are two remotely located community arts groups that have consistently been able to satisfy the OAC's requirement for employing "professional artists". This is despite the fact that the notions of community arts practiced by these organizations are

antithetical to the notion of “professionalizing” the arts. While these organizations are not ACs it is possible that sharing their practices may prove useful to arts councils. Even if the models employed in these organizations are not portable, opportunities for sharing information and strategies would nevertheless prove useful.

During Phase I of the Cultural Mapping Project, ACs and other community arts organizations in northern communities often mentioned a desire to gather with each other over significant distances in order to share and possibly collaborate on their advocacy as well as other issues. The biggest obstacle toward this aspiration is resources, particularly in the north where travel is so expensive. However, CAO could provide space in its programming when subsidizing groups in northern regions to come together for other reasons (e.g., leadership development, conferences, etc.) to enable sharing and networking around common issues of concern. ACs can also take advantage of gatherings within their existing networks by convening sessions to enable discussion and problem solving around issues of concern.

## **Action Plan: Key Components**

### **1. Leadership Development & Training**

As all CAO members have indicated, AC leadership needs ongoing training in strategic planning including conducting needs assessments and program evaluations. This training should comprise a component of the follow-up to the governance project activities already planned. In addition, as the strategic plan developed during Phase I of the Cultural Mapping project indicates, leadership training must include issues of diverse leadership recruitment and retention, as well as training in community building. It is important, whether the training is being coordinated through CAO or locally, that local resources are involved so that local issues are integrated into and addressed in the process.

### **2. Assessment of Opportunities within Municipalities**

As mentioned above, ACs (as well as all CAO members) would benefit from an assessment of municipal policies and plans in order to take advantage of a political moment in which cultural planning is particularly open to community input. Again, local activities in this regard will vary in relation to the context. Nevertheless, it should also be assessed whether organizational leadership desires or would benefit from training in advocacy and lobbying. This could be included in the above-mentioned leadership development training. In addition, ACs should determine the extent to which they can collaborate with advocacy efforts of other arts or community organizations and groups to mutual advantage.

### **3. Partnerships & Collaborations**

The benefit of working with community organizations outside of the arts sector has been demonstrated many times over. ACs would benefit from broadening their existing networks and seeking opportunities to collaborate and partner with other diverse community organizations within and outside of the arts sector. Collaborations could be project based or based on advocating on issues of common concern or both.

### **4. Organizational Development**

CAO should encourage and support ACs (as well as all CAO members) to undertake annual needs assessments and program evaluations with the main objective of maintaining an understanding of community needs and appropriate responses. ACs should also be encouraged to regularly revisit their visions, missions and mandates to ensure that concepts of “community arts” are consistent with community cultural development.

This could take the concrete form of providing training in the governance project, as mention above. It can also be addressed at annual conferences, in the newsletter, on the website and integrated into all programming.

### **5. CAO Membership**

The diversity of CAO members must be encouraged to collaborate with and support each other in the interests of community cultural development and regardless of specific mandates. Activities and programs should always be available and open to all members. CAO membership should not be encouraged to see AC issues as significantly different from those of any organization, (member or otherwise) interested in promoting community arts.

### **6. Lobbying & Advocacy**

CAO should continue to include in all of its lobbying and advocacy activities raising awareness of the contribution community arts makes to community development and encourage funders at all levels to recognize this contribution. CAO must continue to advocate for core administrative funds to enable community arts organizations to achieve the stability and consistency necessary to be relevant and responsive to community needs.

CAO should encourage and support efforts by CAO members as well as non-member community arts groups within regions or with similar mandates to collaborate and develop strategies to address their advocacy concerns. One of the ways this can happen is for CAO to provide time, space, meeting facilitation and possibly other resources for members attending training sessions, conferences or other activities to gather to discuss common concerns and plan advocacy

activities. The precedent for this has already been set at the 2004 CAO conference when ACs were invited to continue a previous discussion on identifying issues of concern. Participants at that meeting expressed a desire for further meetings aimed at developing common strategies to deal with the issues identified. In addition, it was noted that other CAO member organizations that were not ACs would also benefit from such a gathering. While the initiative should come from the ACs or member organizations, CAO should always be amenable to providing whatever resources it can to such activities in the interest of furthering community arts in the province.

## **Conclusion**

In general, it is clear that notions of community arts continue to evolve as rapidly as communities themselves. In a context where funding for ACs has dropped so dramatically in such a short space of time and ACs themselves realize that they suffer from a lack of recognition for their work, it is clear that lobbying and advocacy for restored funding must be balanced with an honest and sincere assessment of what ACs provide to their communities. It is hoped that issues raised in this report will contribute to such an assessment.

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## APPENDIX I

### PROGRAM EVALUATION PROCESS OUTLINE

#### 1. Needs Assessment

- a. What are the needs of the community in which you are operating?
- b. How has the community changed? What is the ethno-cultural make-up of your community?
- c. What needs have been satisfied since you last checked? What new needs have emerged?
- d. How is the community dealing with its needs?
- e. What does the community say it needs help with?
- f. What are the sources of information?
  - i. Participants in programming
  - ii. Other organizations & community leaders
  - iii. Previous reports & evaluations
  - iv. Documents and reports in other sectors or regions
  - v. Arts councils & other funding organizations
  - vi. Staff & volunteers
  - vii. Directors
  - viii. Other?
- g. How can you collect his information? Suggestions:
  - i. Surveys & questionnaires (mail, email or telephone).
  - ii. Meetings or telephone interviews
  - iii. Reports, articles and documents that your organization has collected or others have referred you to.
  - iv. Facilitated focus group sessions.
  - v. Networking.
  - vi. Attending events organized by other organizations.
  - vii. Publications of other community organizations.
  - viii. Other?

#### 2. Goals & Objectives

- a. Were the long or short-term goals of previous programs met? How & why?
  - i. This step actually starts with the setting of goals so that they are easy to evaluate. Goals must be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time Framed).

- b. Assess:
  - i. Were the goals met or not? If not, why not? If so, what new information emerged in the process? What can be done more effectively?
  - ii. Is there a match between current needs and previous goals? Do goals need revising? What new goals can be set?
  - iii. What impact did the program have on the community?
- c. Sources of information – (anecdotal & written; formal & informal)
  - i. Statistical data collected
  - ii. Other organizations & community leaders
  - iii. Previous reports & evaluations
  - iv. Documents and reports in other sectors or regions
  - v. Arts councils & other funding organizations
  - vi. Staff & volunteers
  - vii. Directors
  - viii. Other?

### **3. Planning future programs**

- a. Summarize & review information collected
- b. Assess potential barriers to meeting community needs (e.g., financial, human resources, geographic, cultural, language, etc.)
- c. In the context of your organization's vision, mission, mandate and resources, what can you do to help the community meet its needs?
- d. Does your organization reflect the ethno-cultural make-up of your community? Is there a diversity of cultures, ages, abilities, etc. among community leadership (staff & Board)?
- e. Set goals: new, revised, affirmed. Remember to be SMART.
- f. Design programming to achieve goals.
  - i. What has do be done to make these goals happen?
  - ii. When does it have to happen?
  - iii. Who will do what?
  - iv. What resources will be required?
- g. Develop success criteria: how will you know when your goals have been met? What will it look like?
- h. Develop evaluation processes:

- i. How will you collect information to determine whether your program has been successful?
  1. How will you collect and report anecdotal information?
  2. How will you collect, summarize and report statistical information?
- ii. Who will you collect information from?
- iii. Who will collect what information?
- iv. Who will review and summarize information?