



Mr. Simon Brault, O.C., O.Q., Director and CEO
Canada Council for the Arts
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January 31, 2018

CC: Pierre Lassonde, Chair of the Board of the Canada Council for the Arts
Subject: Independent Media Arts Alliance on peer assessment

Dear Mr. Simon Brault,

I am writing you today on behalf of the Independent Media Arts Alliance (IMAA). IMAA is the only representative of media arts at the national level. As an arts service organizations, our priority is to serve our membership of over 80 organizations and collectives and nearly 16,000 media artists and arts workers across Canada. IMAA has followed the changes to the Canada Council for the Arts with great interest and enthusiasm and we congratulate you on the progress made over the past two years.

Clear and transparent communication is essential as changes to Council are implemented and we write to you today to express some concerns brought forward from the media arts community. A fundamental and detrimental shift to the peer assessment process has taken place without consultation from the arts community. Notably, the role of program officers and peer committees has changed, including the procedures of funding recommendations and decision making.

A past version of the Council's peer assessment strategy entitled "Peer Assessment at the Canada Council for the Arts: How the Council Makes its Grant Decisions" was punctuated with assurances of a clear and transparent funding process as recommended by the arts community. Statements like, "Peer assessment is based on collective decision-making. No applicant to the Council is judged by a single person only, and funding decisions are made by the consensus of the committee members," as well as mentioning the Council's commitment to "the importance of increasing the arts community's participation in its work" showed a clear commitment and trust in the arts community. These reassurances are lacking in the new document.

In the new PDF document "The Application Assessment Process," under the section "The role of peers," it states that the program officer "is responsible for recommending grant amounts" and clarifies the role of peer committees "to provide a qualitative assessment of grant applications, not make financial decisions."

While it is understood that the Canada Council and its staff maintain control of the final distribution of funds, it is essential that the peer committee be implicated in the funding process and not just the assessment of artistic and overall merit of applications. The peer committee must be in a position to make funding recommendations to the program officer and the Board of the Canada Council. If the programming officer is to maintain complete control of grant budgets and their allocation, without input

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from peer committees and the arts community, the arts community is denied a clear and transparent funding process and the program officer put in a position of potential conflict of interest.

We also note the following changes in the procedures for final funding recommendations and their approval, formerly described as:

Following assessment committee meetings, the program officer prepares the necessary internal documentation to obtain approval of grants, based on the assessment committee's recommendations. Authority to approve grants belongs to the Board of the Canada Council, which, for purposes of efficiency, has delegated this responsibility to the Council's Director for grants of \$60,000 and less. **The decisions by the Board and the Director are based on the recommendations of the peer assessment committees.** Approval may be withheld in the cases of procedural impropriety or failure to observe established Council policies.

And now described as:

For all other funding [apart from internal assessments], **the officers recommend grant recipients and amounts on the basis of peer committee recommendations.** These recommendations are approved by the program director for grants under \$100,000; the Director General of Arts Granting Programs or the Director and Chief Executive Officer for grants between \$100,000 and \$500,000. The Board of Directors must approve grants above \$500,000.

It is clear in this example that the weight of recommendations and decision making has been shifted to grant power to the program officer with less emphasis on the peer committee. It is this continual subtle shifting of the role of the program officer throughout the document and the removal of statements which emphasize the role of the peer committee (i.e. the arts community) that our membership finds very troubling. These procedures need to be shifted to rebalance the relationship between the arts community and the Council and for the Council to account fully and openly for its operations.

We welcome the tremendous visionary and rigorous work done by your team and recognize the indispensability of these changes in light of the current political situation. We believe that transparency and openness, openly demonstrated to the sector, will ensure a full rallying to your goals and established means to get there. As such, we urge you to consider these recommendations and revise this document and its outlined procedures.

Sincerely,



Lisa Theriault
Interim National Director
IMAA AAMI