

Summary of the open letter sent on March 23rd, 2015 to Monsieur Simon Brault, Director and CEO of the Canada Council for the Arts

Following the announcement made by the Canada Council for the Arts (CCA) concerning the new proposed funding model although the reform is still only partially outlined, the Independent Media Arts Alliance (IMAA) has already identified a number of questions and concerns of the media arts sector.

In brief:

1. There is a similarity between the proposed new funding model and the ones offered in other jurisdictions¹, including Australia, New Zealand and England. Larger, more established organisations qualify for long-term recurring funding while smaller or emerging groups and artists can only access arts funding on a project-to-project basis.
 - Under the new model, how will the Council prevent further entrenching of systemic discrepancies between well-established institutions on the one hand and micro-organizations, mid-sized groups and emerging structures on the other?
2. A radical simplification of this gradually evolved structure in favour of a “one-grant-fits-all” approach could prove detrimental to niche artistic practices, particularly those that emphasize innovation and experimentation.
 - What mechanisms will operate to ensure that specialized practices are evaluated by peer assessors who possess the relevant expertise, qualifications, and overview of the discipline?
3. The particularities of specific disciplines and fields are also non-negligible, often stemming from long traditions of practice and cultures. The challenges faced by a large and well-established organizations with stable and diversified revenue streams are by nature very distinct from those of smaller organisations, emerging groups or collectives. While we may all share concerns such as excellence, competitiveness, accessibility, outreach, intergenerational equity and public engagement, the approaches to these challenges may in fact be specific to each of our disciplines, as well as to our respective scales and nature of operations.
 - What are the general concerns which the Council deems common to all sectors?
 - On what basis and through what methods of consultation have these concerns been established in each sector or discipline?
4. The new funding model promises to reduce “sweat and tears on the application form.” Numerous reactions to the initial announcement of the new funding model have stressed the point that only an increase to Council’s budget can resolve the problem of access to funding for a larger proportion of high-quality applications. This increase is a crucial element of our sector’s stability and growth.

¹ IMAA has studied the newly reformed arts granting systems in these and other countries, including the Australian Council for the Arts’ *2015 Grants Model*, Arts Council England (ACE)’s *2010–2020 Strategic plan*, and the models recently adopted in New Zealand and the Netherlands.

- Does the Council acknowledge that each program, and the Council as a whole, are currently funded well below capacity?
5. The Council has signalled an encouraging commitment to beginning a new chapter in its relationship with Indigenous artists. However, the media arts community wonders whether a larger commitment to equity will also be addressed by the new funding model, the under-representation and inequitable access to funding faced by newcomer artists, artists of colour, deaf and disabled artists, members of official minority language communities and other marginalized groups should be identified as a priority by Council.
 - How will the Canada Council's new model ensure ongoing equity of access to its programs and services for all under-represented artists and organisations?
 6. This heightened access for new and emerging structures may come at the expense of existing support to smaller organizations already in the funding stream.
 - How does the Council propose to strike a balance between channelling support to emerging artists and groups without jeopardizing the assets of well-established institutions?
 7. The new programs have been described as “non-disciplinary” and covering all fields of artistic practice. IMAA believes that the media arts remain a distinct field of activity unto itself, possessing a set of aesthetic practices well-understood by its community of practitioners.
 - Does the Council recognize the importance of balancing the drive towards cross-disciplinarity with the need to preserve the core integrity of certain artistic practices and traditions?
 8. We understand that the proposed simplification of programs is designed in part to facilitate the implementation of national goals and priorities on a Council-wide basis.
 - What are the national goals and priorities envisaged by Council?
 - How and by whom are these national priorities being set? As a result of what kinds of consultation with the arts community and its various sectors and disciplines?
 9. M. Brault has alluded to a “double jury” system, one discipline-oriented and a second, program-oriented. The relationship between these two juries merits further clarification.
 - Can the Council articulate more fully its vision for the double jury system and the interaction between the two juries?

Individual artists, collectives, and small to mid-sized organisations, despite their sometimes precarious status, contribute significantly to the overall strength of the arts ecosystem. Their light and flexible structures are ideally suited to fostering experimentation and innovation, and draw on their own communities of practice to identify and support the emergence of new forms and practices. We trust that the Council's new model will continue to offer significant and sustained support to all organisations, regardless of scale and status, whose mandates nurture and encourage the production and dissemination of innovative art forms.

The Independent Media Arts Alliance (IMAA) is the National Arts Service Organization for the Media Arts. With a coast-to-coast-to-coast membership of nearly 100 artist-run centres, festivals, and distributors, we represent over 16,000 independent media artists and creators engaged in independent film, video, audio and new media arts.
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