

CACTI
(CULTURAL ARTS CENTRE TORONTO INC.)

FEASIBILITY STUDY
FINAL REPORT

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CACTI FEASIBILITY STUDY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In May 1994, CACTI (Cultural Arts Centre Toronto Inc.) commissioned the firm of N.L. Hushion and Associates, in association with Susan Speigel Architect Inc., to complete a study to ascertain the feasibility of the establishment of an arts centre/building to house facilities for the production, distribution and exhibition of media-based art in Toronto.

CACTI is a collective comprised of six non-profit artist-run centres which provide facilities and services for production, distribution, and exhibition of media based artworks. The member organizations of CACTI are:

Canadian Filmmakers' Distribution Centre
Inter/Access
Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto
The Photon League
Toronto Photographers Workshop
Trinity Square Video.

The Final Report on the Feasibility Study documents the consultants' findings, demonstrates the project's feasibility, and details specific options for the acquisition of a facility to house the proposed arts centre. The consultants have developed two clear Facility Options for CACTI, based upon the findings of the Study and the direction provided by the CACTI Steering Committee. One option presents concrete opportunities for immediate facility acquisition, while the other option provides prototypes which can be used to guide the acquisition of a facility at a later time.

Facility Option 1 has been developed around 2 actual facilities that are currently available for rental, located at 401 Richmond St. W., and at 605 Adelaide St. W. Both of these facilities meet the facility and facility acquisition criteria established through the course of the Study; these criteria are discussed fully in the Final Report.

Preliminary negotiations with the landlords of both facilities have shown them to be viable facility options for CACTI. Perhaps most significantly, negotiations have revealed that funding for the rental and tenant improvement costs for both of these facilities could be met by the CACTI member groups themselves, through a

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combination of rent and loan repayment costs equalling approximately \$10 per sq.ft. Consequently, the CACTI member groups could finance the capital costs of the CACTI project without the provision of capital funds from government or other private sources. (The details of these creative financing approaches are found in the Final Report.)

The consultants recommend that the CACTI Steering Committee pursue Option 1, by continuing negotiations with the landlords of both facilities. Such an approach will best capitalize on the momentum of this Study, and will save the Steering Committee both time and money, as much of the initial research and development for both of these facilities is complete. Guidelines and recommendations for continuing negotiations are provided in the Final Report.

Ultimately, the financial terms which are developed during the negotiation process will determine which of these two facilities is the most suitable for CACTI, since both facilities meet the necessary criteria for a CACTI facility.

If, for whatever reason, the Steering Committee decides not to acquire either of the Option 1 facilities, then Option 2 becomes operative. In this Option, the Steering Committee can use the information and templates that were developed for the facilities in Option 1 as prototypes to guide the selection of an alternate facility. Guidelines for continuing the search for a facility are provided in the Final Report.

Regardless of which option is ultimately pursued by the Steering Committee, the research and consultations which have been undertaken by the consultants during the course of this Feasibility Study have shown the CACTI project to be both viable and desirable, and have amply demonstrated the benefits of the project to both the larger Toronto artistic community and the current CACTI member groups. The CACTI project has the potential to contribute significantly to cultural life in Toronto.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report documents the findings and conclusions of a Feasibility Study on the establishment of an arts centre/building to house facilities for the production, distribution and exhibition of media-based art in Toronto.

This study was commissioned by CACTI (Cultural Arts Centre Toronto Inc.), a collective comprised of six non-profit artist-run centres which provide facilities and services for production, distribution, and exhibition of media based artworks, including film, video, holography, photography and electronic media. The motivation for forming CACTI was to create a contemporary media arts centre by securing an affordable facility to house these and possibly other organizations. The unique collaborative possibilities which can arise from such a venture are also a significant motivating factor in the development of the CACTI project.

This innovative project both responds to a demonstrated need in the arts community for an affordable arts centre, and anticipates the future needs of the organizations involved in the project. Both practical and visionary, the CACTI project has the potential to contribute significantly to the cultural life of Toronto.

1.1 Methodology

As the result of an open tender process, N.L.Hushion and Associates and Susan Speigel Architect Inc. were contracted to conduct this Feasibility Study. The study began in mid-May 1994, and progressed through six phases until its completion in mid-August 1994. A highly participatory process enabled the CACTI Steering Committee to make important decisions about the direction the Study would take throughout the process.

During Phase 1, the consultants reviewed the materials produced by a previous consulting team during a 1992 Feasibility Study which was terminated while in progress. Discussions with the Steering Committee revealed the strengths and weaknesses of those materials.

Phase 2 began with a workshop at which members of the Steering Committee and Boards of the CACTI member groups developed a mission statement for CACTI. This statement provided a context within which the Study could progress in a coherent and focused manner.

Further work during Phase 2 ascertained the community need for a media arts centre through research, interviews and two focus groups which involved members of the media arts community. The facility and management needs of each of the CACTI member groups, and the attitudes of each of those groups towards the CACTI project, were identified through interviews with Steering Committee members. Intensive research into the present and future spatial and programmatic requirements of each of the member groups yielded important facility information. Consultations and research in the real estate sector provided important information about the need for affordable space for arts groups, the availability of facilities in Toronto, and the feasibility of different facility acquisition strategies.

The information gathered during Phase 2 was presented to the Steering Committee during the Phase 3 Interim Report Workshop. At this workshop, specific options for the management and acquisition of a facility were presented, based on the research done during Phase 2; the Steering Committee identified two options which they felt best suited CACTI's needs for further development by the consultants. The Interim Report documents the information presented during the workshop, and the decisions which were made by the Steering Committee.

Phase 4 took as its starting point the decisions made and directions identified by the Steering Committee during Phase 3. The consultants identified potential facilities for CACTI; site visits with the Steering Committee resulted in the selection of two actual facilities for which capital cost, capital financing, and operating cost projections were developed through discussions and negotiations with the landlords of each facility. Each of these facilities meet the criteria and needs of CACTI as determined during Phases 2 and 3 of the Study.

Phase 5, a Draft Final Report workshop, presented the Steering Committee with specific, time-sensitive options for the acquisition of a facility for CACTI, from which the Steering Committee members identified their preferred option. The Steering Committee agreed to hold a further meeting to discuss the options, and to determine a future course of action for the project.

This document, the Final Report for the Study, documents the findings of the consultants, and details the specific options for the acquisition of a facility that were presented to the Steering Committee during the Draft Final Report Workshop, including the consultants' recommendations, the Steering Committee's reactions, and an implementation plan for the development of an arts centre for CACTI.

2.0 MAJOR THEMES AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

In order to provide a context for the Facility Options and Recommendations which are contained in Sections 3.0 and 4.0 of this Report, the major themes and findings of this Study are detailed below.

2.1 CACTI Philosophy

Early discussions with members of the Steering Committee revealed that CACTI lacked a strong sense of shared philosophy. Comprised of six different groups, and having had many different Steering Committee members during the four years since the project was launched, CACTI's purpose was not clearly articulated.

A mission statement workshop, which was held early in the Study process, clarified the philosophy and goals which defined the CACTI project. The workshop was attended by Steering Committee and selected Board members of the CACTI member organizations, and was facilitated by Nancy Hushion. During the course of the workshop, participants debated a number of issues; the results of their deliberations are clearly articulated in the following Mission Statement:

"CACTI is a coalition of membership-based, non-profit, culturally diverse artist-run groups that is dedicated to fostering and facilitating living cultural practice by obtaining a facility which is accessible, equitable, physically convenient, and beneficial to its members, artists, and the public.

This facility will be a holistically healthy, welcoming space with some shared basic facilities that will allow for increased self-determination and cooperation. It will facilitate cultural production, distribution, and exhibition, and will enhance the groups' positive evolution.

CACTI is committed to providing economical means of collaboration in order to meet the needs of its member groups. By creating a recognizable public entity, such collaboration will allow for increased clout, bargaining power and representation for any common/shared goals.

CACTI supports an environment which is respectful of the human rights of diverse communities, by design and policy, and expands and

enriches the role of art and artists."

This mission statement provides an articulate vision for CACTI, and a focused context within which further work for the Study could progress.

Since many deliberate decisions made during the course of the workshop by the Steering Committee are reflected in this mission statement, a closer examination of certain passages will enable us to understand the issues which the Steering Committee faced in defining CACTI's vision. These passages will have distinct ramifications for CACTI in the future.

CACTI is a coalition of membership-based, non-profit, culturally diverse artist-run groups.

CACTI member groups must be membership-based, non-profit, culturally diverse, artist-run groups. There is no preset limit on the number of groups which can become CACTI members.

... is dedicated to fostering and facilitating living cultural practice.

This description of CACTI's role specifically avoids defining the proposed arts centre as a "media arts" centre, and therefore does not limit the types of artforms with which CACTI member groups can be involved. This represents a decision on the part of the Steering Committee to abandon its earlier intent to create an arts centre which would specifically foster the media arts.

... through the acquisition of a facility.

This statement clearly defines CACTI's primary purpose as facility acquisition.

This facility will be a holistically healthy, welcoming space with some shared basic facilities that will allow for increased self-determination and cooperation.

The Steering Committee's decision to commit to the sharing of basic

facilities allows for the creation of a collaborative atmosphere within the new facility, without jeopardizing the autonomy of each of the member groups.

The Steering Committee was adamant that all CACTI member groups retain complete autonomy. Consequently, it was agreed that only basic facilities be shared; the Steering Committee felt that the sharing of more functional facilities (such as reception areas, or editing suites) could result in a loss of autonomy (real or perceived) for each group.

CACTI is committed to providing economical means of collaboration in order to meet the needs of its member groups.

This statement clearly reflects the Steering Committee's decision that CACTI should continue to exist after it has served its primary purpose of facility acquisition. At that time, CACTI's main role will be to facilitate collaboration between member groups in the facility.

All of the current CACTI member organizations are keenly interested in benefitting from a shared facility by developing synergies and links between member groups. They see the sharing of basic facilities and the initiation of joint programming ventures as key ways of developing synergies from which their memberships could benefit. They also feel that collaboration would raise their profile within the artistic community, giving them a stronger voice with which to speak to issues of common concern.

CACTI supports a environment which is respectful of the human rights of diverse communities ...

The Steering Committee is committed to the principles and the reality of racial equity.

In creating its mission statement, the CACTI Steering Committee clearly defined CACTI's basic philosophical tenets and goals. CACTI is an organization, comprised of artist-run groups, which is dedicated to the creation of an arts centre, through the acquisition of a facility in which member groups can remain autonomous, while developing synergies through shared basic facilities and collaborative endeavours.

2.2 CACTI Community Need

In order to ascertain the feasibility of the CACTI project, the needs of the larger community for an arts centre of the type proposed by CACTI were examined. The consultants found that a need for such a centre existed both in terms of the need for affordable space for non-profit arts organizations in Toronto, and the need for an arts centre which could house media-based and other arts organizations.

The need for affordable space for artists and arts organizations in Toronto has been well documented in a number of studies, the most comprehensive of which is *No Vacancy: A Cultural Facilities Policy for the City of Toronto* (Toronto: Toronto Arts Council, 1988).

Despite the change in the real estate climate which has taken place since the publication of this report, there is still a need for stable, affordable space. The current climate provides an excellent opportunity for arts organizations to improve their inadequate facility situations. Many of the CACTI member groups, for example, are currently housed in inadequate facilities. Office space is lacking, with as many as 6 people in one organization sharing an office which could comfortably hold three at the most. As many of the CACTI groups are nearing the end of their leases, now is the perfect opportunity for them to improve their physical environment.

The other area of need which is relevant to this Study is the need within the larger community for an arts centre such as that envisioned by the CACTI Steering Committee. Two focus groups, conducted with the participation of members of the media arts community, provided strong evidence of both the need for and the potential benefits of such an arts centre.

A major theme which emerged from the focus groups was the fragmentation of the media arts community, and the role which an arts centre could play in combatting that fragmentation. A predominant vision amongst participants involved the existence of a centre at which artists could easily work in the different media represented. It was suggested that the implementation of a joint membership plan amongst the member groups might facilitate that artistic exchange. It was also suggested that a shared library/archive for media arts might provide a solid core for a media arts centre. Generally, it was felt that a sharing of resources amongst the member organizations of the proposed arts centre would be necessary in order to effectively overcome fragmentation.

Participants warned against the "ghettoization" of the media arts that could result from the creation of a centre specifically dedicated to the media arts, and therefore supported the Steering Committee's decision not to limit participation in the centre to media arts organizations.

The overall vision which focus group participants had for an arts centre varied from small and organic to large and synergistically planned. All participants agreed that the creation of a "centre" implied a degree of stasis, and were convinced of the need for a certain level of flux. A fluid movement of tenants within the centre was seen as one way of ensuring flux. In fact, most participants were interested in seeing as many organizations as possible involved with the arts centre.

Many participants commented on the funding cuts which face the arts community, and saw the creation of an arts centre, with shared resources and facilities, as one way of effectively dealing with potential reductions in funding.

In general, focus group participants supported the initiatives that had been taken by the CACTI Steering Committee, but showed little concern with issues of autonomy. Participants felt that the provision of necessary services to artists should take precedence over the maintenance of autonomy between CACTI member groups.