



CREATING A NEW ARTS SERVICE ORGANIZATION IN OTTAWA ANALYSIS REPORT OF THE RESULTS OF A COMMUNITY-WIDE SURVEY

Introduction

The Ottawa Arts Council and Arts Network Ottawa conducted a community online survey in the Fall 2023 to kick off the community engagement process and to assess the perspectives and expectations surrounding the merger of the two organizations.

This survey garnered a diverse array of responses from individuals deeply invested in the city's vibrant arts community. The participants, comprising artists, arts professionals, and community members, provided valuable insights into their feelings, concerns, and aspirations regarding the joining of these two organizations.

The comments touched on themes such as community revitalization, excitement for the merger, individual inquiries, and suggestions for improvement. There was a noticeable emphasis on the need for transparency, collaboration, and streamlined efforts to propel Ottawa's arts community forward. This summary captures the rich tapestry of opinions expressed by those who recognize the transformative potential of this merger and highlights the key themes that emerged from their feedback.

1. What are the 3 key things that the organizations are currently doing that have the most impact on the Ottawa community?

1. Grants, Workshops, Mentorship:
Keep: Providing funds for the creation of new works, dispersing grant funding, and offering mentorship and learning events.
Consider: Ensuring consistent artist compensation practices and addressing the legacy of marginalization and inequity within the arts community.
2. Advocacy, Funding, Professional Development:
Keep: Being leaders in municipal political advocacy, financial resilience projects like ActivArt Microgrants, and accessible professional development opportunities.

Consider: Addressing concerns about tokenism and working towards a more inclusive reputation.

3. Promotion, Awards, Networking:

Keep: Promoting events, advocating for awards, and fostering networking opportunities within the arts community.

Consider: Expanding efforts to make the organizations more welcoming and connected, and ensuring a proactive vision for Ottawa as a creative center.

These priorities highlight the need for continued support through grants, mentorship, and workshops, a focus on advocacy for increased funding, and a commitment to fostering a vibrant arts community through promotion, awards, and networking opportunities. Addressing concerns about equity and inclusivity is crucial for the organizations' success and reputation.

2. What do we need to keep hold of for this journey/process? What do we need to leave behind?

Summary of Priorities

Keep:

- Embrace the service-oriented aspect, genuine interactions, and quick response to inquiries.
- Focus on partnership building with arts and culture organizations across Ottawa.
- Situate the arts as foundational for civil society and community well-being.
- Awards, professional development opportunities, and funding for artists.
- Balanced representation of various artistic disciplines, including those not widely recognized.
- Information sharing through resourceful newsletters.
- Support for emerging artists, mentorship opportunities, and variety in funding programs.
- Clear and transparent purpose, accountability to the community.
- Advocacy efforts and support for growth and the arts and culture sector in Ottawa.
- Passion and a cooperative attitude, creating a safe and supportive ecosystem.
- Pushing for grants and exhibition spaces, advocating for increased support to the arts.

Let Go Of:

- Downtown-centric thinking and territorial attitudes.
- Elitism, insular culture, and outdated notions of silos.
- Low artist fees and inadequate compensation for artists.
- White saviour complexes, colonial attitudes, and tokenism.
- Inter-organizational rivalries and lack of coordination.
- Awards with unclear parameters and redundant overhead.
- Being hard to reach, red tape, and a scarcity mindset.
- Vague, wishy-washy language, and busy work with minimal impact.
- Small city thinking and the idea that everyone has the same access and abilities.
- Bias, favouritism, and financial barriers for low-income individuals.
- Cliquiness and dividing artists into identity groups.

Consider:

- Exploring the cost-benefit analysis of certain events and programs.
- Reinvigorating the organization and reinventing its identity.
- Analyzing and ranking responses to prioritize key areas of focus for the new organization.
- Providing accessible information about regional artists to the public.
- Creating bridge connections in the global community.
- Cohesive events and support across Ottawa.
- These priorities reflect the need for a more inclusive, supportive, and transparent arts organization that actively engages with the diverse artistic community in Ottawa, advocates for increased support, and fosters a sense of cooperation and collective growth.

3. Describe in a one-word answer how you are feeling about the joining of these two organizations.

Summary of Feedback on the Joining of Organizations:

The majority of responses express excitement, hope, and positivity about the joining of the two organizations. There is a sense of optimism, with words like "empowering," "fantastic," and "buoyant" reflecting a positive outlook. Some responses indicate mixed feelings or uncertainty, while a few express concerns about fitting in as a POC artist or skepticism about the benefits of a larger organization. Addressing inclusivity and communication may be key in addressing these concerns. Overall, the feedback suggests a general anticipation for positive outcomes from the merger.

Positive Responses:

Excited
Opportunity
Hopeful!!
Great!
Timely
Intrigued
Empowering!!
Fantastic
Good
Optimistic
Galvanize
Ideal
Impressed
Interested
Sounds good
Harmony
Fine
Sounds great
Excited, hopeful
It's about time.
Logical
Smart
Change
Great idea
Great!
Fantastic!!!
Supportive
Expectation
Accepting
Relieved
Buoyant
Hopeful

Mixed/Neutral Responses:

Uncertainty
Uninformed/curious
Ambivalent
Indifferent
Nonplussed
Skeptical of the benefits of a larger organization.
Unsure
Anxious.
Inevitable

Unimpressed
Uncertain

Concerns and Challenges:

Horrible

Negatively

I struggle to find a spot where I fit in as a POC artist. All help seems to go to artists with degrees or super long-established older people.

Anxious.

4. What improvements do you hope the joined organization creates?

Summary of Prioritized Improvements for the Joined Organization:

1. Unified Voice and Coordination:
Joining communities, staff, and resources for increased support.
Coordinated and unified advocacy for the arts in Ottawa.
Reduction of redundant services for more efficient resource utilization.
2. Inclusivity and Diversity:
Adequate compensation for performing and exhibiting artists.
Comprehensive diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategy with real, tangible action.
Collaboration with external organizations to implement safeguards against suppression and misconduct.
3. Community Enrichment and Representation:
A return to making the arts a community-enriching experience for all citizens.
Much stronger advocacy for the arts with multiple sectors and greater representation from all players in the local arts scene.
4. Clarity of Purpose and Communication:
Clarity of purpose and stronger advocacy for the arts in Ottawa.
Reduction of confusion about arts activities in the city.
Streamlining communication and promoting the work of the city's arts organizations and artists.
5. Funding and Opportunities:
Reduction of overhead for more efficient use of resources.
More opportunities and funding for artists, particularly those not in performance arts.

Greater balance of arts funding across the city.

6. Professional Development and Networking:
Professional development for arts workers.
Networking opportunities for artists and organizations.
Mentorship opportunities for artists.
7. Visibility and Promotion:
More visibility and professionalism for local artists.
Promotion for artists and community events to celebrate the arts.
Efficiencies of scale in admin and operations for improved visibility.
8. Access and Community Engagement:
Easier access for all and more distribution of funds.
More opportunities for small art groups to get involved.
A stronger public sense of Ottawa as a city that supports the arts.
9. Streamlined Processes and Innovation:
Streamlining of efforts with a sense of listening, advising, growth, and building.
Elimination of duplication in services for cost savings.
Innovations to bring international artists to Ottawa.
10. Inclusive Programming and Opportunities:
More opportunities for collaboration and more open grants.
Inviting unknown artisans and older artists to participate.
One-stop-shop for local artist needs, including guidance, recognition, and opportunities.
11. Arts Education and Community Workshops:
Industry-specific workshops to prepare citizens for a career in the arts.
More community events to celebrate the arts.
Opportunities to learn through workshops, road trips, tech talks, and meetings.
12. Advocacy and Representation:
Stronger artists' voice and increased opportunities.
Better advocacy and funding for arts organizations and artists.
Unified voice/direction for the arts community city-wide.
13. Affordability and Workspace Advocacy:
Advocating for affordable workspaces for artists in Ottawa.
Critical mass for larger projects and stronger local voice.

More advocating for new funding opportunities for artists.

14. Practical and Pragmatic Programs:

More pragmatic programs that help everyone, not just specific groups.

Opportunities for data management and automated submission processes.

15. Rural Representation and Community Engagement:

More representation of artists in rural communities around Ottawa.

Opportunities to engage the community in preparing citizens for a life and career in the arts.

These priorities reflect the diverse expectations and aspirations of the community, emphasizing collaboration, diversity, inclusivity, streamlined processes, improved communication, and increased opportunities and support for artists across various sectors and demographics.

5. What are the key questions that we need to answer through this process?

These questions reflect a broad range of concerns related to organizational purpose, community engagement, inclusivity, transparency, collaboration, funding, and strategic planning, indicating the complexity of merging two arts organizations and the expectations for the new entity.

Summary of Key Questions:

Organizational Mandate and Core Goals:

What is the mandate or core goal of the new organization?

How will it serve the community?

How will it break down barriers for emerging artists?

Collaboration and Community Engagement:

How will it coordinate with Ottawa's many arts organizations?

How will it offer joint programming and reach new audiences?

How will the organization advertise and market its services?

Community Input and Collaboration:

Are the organizations in touch with the local arts sector's needs?

How can the organization be collaborative and representative?
What are the best paths forward for the Ottawa arts community post-COVID?

Reputation, Inclusion, and Equity:

How will the organization address its reputation and make amends?
What reforms or changes have been effective in the past?
How will it address systemic inequities and decolonize its structures?

Management and Partnership Strategies:

How can the councils merge to serve the community better?
What expertise will be retained, and how will partnerships be forged?
How can the organization support the arts community effectively?

Support, Inclusivity, and Purpose:

How can the organization best support the arts community's needs?
How can it facilitate the inclusion of arts into all aspects of the city?
What is the purpose of a municipal arts council, and how does it make an impact?

Transparency, Accountability, and Leadership:

Who is in charge, and what does transparency and accountability look like?
How will the organization measure its impact on artists' lives?
How do leadership and management ensure a voice for diverse groups?

Funding, Resources, and Collaboration:

How will the organization ensure sufficient funding and resources?
How will it collaborate with other arts service organizations?
How can it get more money for artists and support city council's role?

Membership, Services, and Accessibility:

How much will be the cost of membership, and what services will be offered?
How can the organization ensure accessibility for artists?
How will it make meaningful connections and share opportunities?

Vision, Collaboration, and Impact:

What will be the unified vision, and how will it benefit artists?
How can the organization serve all artistic people in Ottawa?
How will it engage and raise the profile of all the artists it serves?

Strategic Planning and Efficiency:

How can the organizations function efficiently as a new creative body?

What technological processes can be improved for a smoother transition?

How can higher-level management positions be held by equity-deserving folks?

Community Needs and Collaboration:

What does the Ottawa arts community need right now?

How can the organization infuse arts into more aspects of everyday life?

How can it collaborate with other entities and foster meaningful connections?

Representation, Inclusivity, and Funding:

How will the organization represent all artists inclusively?

How can it amplify and serve diverse voices and arts communities?

How do we get money in the hands of artists?

6. Other Comments - Themes Identified in the Comments:

These themes reflect a diverse range of perspectives, including excitement, inquiries, suggestions for improvement, and a strong emphasis on collaboration, transparency, and community impact.

Community Revitalization and Safety:

Concerns about abandoned buildings affecting downtown vitality.

Emphasizes the importance of an attractive and safe downtown arts district.

Excitement and Support:

Positive anticipation and excitement for the merging of resources.

Expresses optimism and support for the new organization.

Individual Inquiries and Requests:

Personal requests for joint email responses, acknowledgments, and explanations.

Specific inquiries about Instagram account restrictions.

Appreciation and Encouragement:

Expresses gratitude and thanks for the organization's work.

Wishes for a successful transition and offers best wishes.

Suggestions for Improvement:

Proposal to allow artists to join both organizations with one membership fee.

Suggestion to consider a move to a more publicly accessible office.

Streamlining and Efficiency:

Support for the move, emphasizing the need to streamline organizations.

Expectation that the merger will reduce duplication and redundancy.

Clarity and Transparency:

Questions about the reasons behind the merger decision.

Calls for transparency regarding the impact on arts funding and community.

Perception of Arts Organizations:

Reflection on the perception that people don't understand what arts organizations do.

Call for more aggressive advocacy for the arts in the city.

Support for Street Art Legislation:

Expression of interest in pushing for fair and updated street art legislation.

Support for the Merger:

Long-time hope for the merger, expressing satisfaction with the decision.

Recognition of the shared purpose of the two organizations.

Advocacy for Arts Representation:

Call for creating a seat for the arts on city council.

Desire for more insightful and active support for grassroots change.

Coordination and Unified Programs:

Desire for a coordinated and unified Mural Arts Program for the city.

Question about the location of the new office and the accessibility of meetings.

Artistic Expression and Purpose:

Philosophical inquiry into the real aim of art.

Suggestion for interviews with artists on the organization's blog.

Well-Wishes and Encouragement:

Well-wishes and encouragement for the challenging process of merging.

Suggestion to consider an objective third-party facilitator for guidance.

Inclusivity and Collaboration:

Desire for inclusivity of artists from the National Capital Region.
Interest in being included and finding a place in the new group.

Emphasis on Collaboration and Action:

Call for organizations to work together to promote the arts as a viable career.
Emphasis on using pre-existing knowledge and resources for collective action.

Thrill and Maturity:

Expresses thrill and happiness about the merger.
Recognizes the maturity and collaborative mindset of the organizations' leaders.