



SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS  
FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

# **Local Arts Initiatives and Social Connectedness in Canada**

By Jedidah Nabwangu  
Social Connectedness Fellow 2017  
Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness  
[www.socialconnectedness.org](http://www.socialconnectedness.org)  
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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The key findings outlined in this report by way of analytical archival research and outreach aim to establish the significance of the arts in community building, as exemplified by the non-profit sector in Canada. The report explores the powerful role that local artistic non-profit organizations (specifically theatre groups and companies) play in building social connectedness at the community level. While there have indeed been efforts made by the Canadian government in recent years to provide more funding for social arts and cultural programs in Canada, more can still be done to support this important sector. The misallocation of resources, whether regionally or hierarchically, has been detrimental to the survival and/or general practice of some organizations. As such, this report aims to expose the true value and positive effects that these actors have on community development, with the ultimate hope of achieving greater government and community support for the arts in Canada.

Through in-depth research, supported by both primary and secondary sources, including the case studies of five different local theatre groups in Montreal, Quebec and Ottawa, Ontario, the evidence gathered here demonstrates the value of the arts in Canadian communities as key alleviators of social isolation through various means. In the case of theatre, this value takes on various forms, from providing an intersectional take on theatre and social justice to student-run societies on campuses that simultaneously serve as a therapeutic release for students who may be feeling isolated. The common characteristic is the uplift provided to Canadians.

The report also offers several policy recommendations aimed towards the Canadian Government, the Canadian public, and the non-profit organizations themselves in order to provide guidance on how to effectively support the local artistic sector in Canada.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Despite its significant contribution to society, the arts as a discipline remains highly neglected and stigmatized in policymaking at all levels of Canadian Government. While recent strides towards the prioritization of arts funding have indeed been made under the current

Canadian government, there definitely remains room for improvement. For one thing, often these efforts are aimed at supporting high profile, for-profit organizations. As a result, artistic and cultural social programs nationwide have historically been underfunded, creating a heavy burden on local non-profit organizations that depend on government grants and opportunities as significant means of financial support to continue their artistic endeavours. Nevertheless, these organizations still make a tremendous impact in terms of community building in Canada, as their micro-scale focus depends heavily on constant community member involvement and interaction.

Through an analysis of five different grassroots actors based in Ottawa and Montreal, this report advocates for increased government and community support of artistic grassroots organizations in Canada. It will analyze the particular developmental work that certain non-profit initiatives are currently undertaking, with a special focus on theatre-oriented groups, as this discipline in particular has great capacity to build social connectedness among individuals. The overall goal is to raise awareness about the role of local creative, non-profit organizations in community development through core activities such as education, professional and personal human development, and broadening accessibility. The specific groups examined are Black Theatre Workshop (BTW), McGill Savoy Society, Imago Theatre, Repercussion Theatre, and A Company of Fools.

The report concludes with recommendations, which aim to provide guidance on how support for the local artistic sector in Canada can be improved moving forward. Recommendations will be geared towards the Government of Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts, regional Canadian governing bodies and communities, and creative non-profit organizations.

## **PROFILES OF LOCAL INITIATIVES**

This section profiles several existing local initiatives, which demonstrate the rich benefits that theatre and the arts offer in terms of building community and social

connectedness. The limitations of these initiatives will also be explored and addressed further in the policy recommendations section.

### ***Black Theatre Workshop***

Founded in 1972, Black Theatre Workshop (BTW) remains the oldest Black theatre company in Canada and has since become a highly influential trailblazer when it comes to actively practicing the intersection of theatre and social justice in the Montreal area. As its mandate states, and as its Artist Mentorship Program coordinator was able to further detail in an interview, BTW “aims to promote and produce Black theatre that educates, entertains and delights its audiences. The company strives to create a greater cross-cultural understanding by its presence and the intrinsic value of its work.”<sup>1</sup> Through producing theatre that depicts the often “blatant lack of stories of racialized and marginalized people in general... people with mental illnesses [and] any cross-section of story,”<sup>2</sup> BTW familiarizes and educates its audiences about belonging using an unconventional cultural lens.

BTW is located in the heart of the Montreal plateau in the Montreal Arts Interculturels Centre and serves as the home base for a variety of local artists of colour and other marginalized groups. From production to artistic social programs, BTW makes it its mission to support the creative endeavours of both established and emerging artists in the Montreal community, with the ultimate intention of “[diversifying] and [democratizing] Canada by widening the range of performing arts and cultures.”<sup>3</sup> By supporting such individuals, BTW creates a safe space for marginalized artists to create and share their own stories and experiences that often go unheard or are purposely excluded from mainstream platforms. Furthermore, theatrical productions often incorporate the added benefit of educational elements into the public exposition of their stories.

As coordinator of the company's annual Artist Mentorship Program, Warona Setshswaelo believes the company's efforts through the program contribute to social connectedness in that it “is geared towards emerging artists who really want to follow this

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<sup>1</sup> Black Theatre Workshop, “Mission” *Who We Are* (Montreal: Black Theatre Workshop, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Warona Setshswaelo, “BTW Interview” (Montreal: Black Theatre Workshop, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> BTW, “Mission”.

[theatre] as a career.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, BTW not only harnesses theatre as a vehicle to further public awareness and social justice, it also serves to empower individual artists of marginalized identity on a professional level as well.

The Artist Mentorship Program "consists of 10-15 participants that [they] accept from varying disciplines in theatre.”<sup>5</sup> When asked about the program’s main activities, Setshswaelo replied, "We meet, have discussions, workshops. We try to get relevant people in the room [...] anyway that we can point someone in the right direction. Give them the advice. We have workshops on taxes, on grant writing. We want to familiarize them with a professional state of mind in terms of the art.”<sup>6</sup> Such professional development made readily-available to members of the Montreal community, at no cost, finds its true value in the way that it offers marginalized demographics essential life skills that will help them excel in the professional sphere. BTW “[understands] that some of these voices have a harder time getting to the point that they need, so [they] try to be a solution to this problem.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, BTW’s Artist Mentorship Program seeks to address the traditional lack of opportunity for Black artists and give them the tools needed to develop their careers.

In terms of the biggest challenges that lie ahead of BTW, Setshswaelo alluded to two major issues. The first is that while, "We [now] understand that it's great to have Black performers [...] we don't see many Black artists when it comes to more behind the scene work. Directors, writers, it's lacking.”<sup>8</sup> The other challenge, she explains, is that unfortunately other theatre companies often use BTW as a 'scapegoat', concluding that “they might not necessarily need to program Black stories because BTW exists.”<sup>9</sup>

### ***McGill Savoy Society***

The McGill Savoy Society is a non-profit, student theatre group based in Montreal at McGill University. With a unique history, McGill Savoy has been around for a little over 50 years, having first been established in 1964 by students at the university who wanted to pay

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<sup>4</sup>Setshswaelo, "BTW Interview".

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Setshswaelo, "BTW Interview".

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

tribute to the production of Gilbert and Sullivan.<sup>10</sup> Both Gilbert and Sullivan founded the original Savoy Theatre located in the City of Westminster in London, England in 1881 in order to showcase a variety of comic operas.<sup>11</sup> McGill Savoy's contemporary purpose very much reflects this fundamental aspect of Gilbert and Sullivan's work, but with the distinct addition of fostering social connectedness through "friendships [that] are formed through the activity of producing one or two high-profile spectacular shows per year."<sup>12</sup>

In recent years, the issue of university student isolation has become an extensive topic of public discussion. In 2016, the National College Health Assessment revealed that "nearly 70% of university students [in Canada] battle loneliness during the school year,"<sup>13</sup> and that the majority of students on campuses felt "very lonely [and] so depressed that it was difficult to function."<sup>14</sup> This situation is not unique to Canada. In 2013, *The Huffington Post* published an article discussing the negative effects of fast-paced and high-pressure university environments in the UK. One student said, "University can be one of the most isolating experiences ever," while others described certain forms of self-medicating, such as 'binge-drinking culture', that ultimately worsened their mental health.<sup>15</sup>

Maia De Graaf, former lighting designer and assistant producer at McGill Savoy, offered a different picture. De Graaf, describes her experience at McGill Savoy during the 2015-2016 school year as being one that allowed her to "[make] a lot of friends [...] who [she] related to on a different level in terms of creativity instead of academics."<sup>16</sup> When asked about forming relationships in creative endeavours versus in academics, she explained that creativity is important in that "it's really nice to have something that you can talk to the other person about and find that they are just as passionate... someone you can share ideas with."<sup>17</sup> Through De Graaf's descriptions, it becomes evident that such creative outlets on university campuses serve

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<sup>10</sup> The McGill Savoy Society, "About G&S and the history of the McGill Savoy Society" *About Savoy* (Montreal: The McGill Savoy Society, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> McGill Savoy, "About G&S".

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Teghan Beaudette, "Nearly 70% of university students battle loneliness during school year, survey says" *CBC News: Manitoba* (Manitoba: CBC Radio-Canada, 2016)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Fionn Shiner, "Student Depression: 'University Can Be One of the Most Isolating Experiences Ever'," *The Huffington Post UK*. (New York City: Oath Inc., 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Maia De Graaf, "McGill Savoy Society Interview" (Montreal: McGill Savoy Society, 2017).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

a purpose much higher than just creative fulfilment: they provide opportunities to build real human connections among young people who may be prone to social isolation.

As with BTW, De Graaf also expressed some challenges that the company will have to overcome in the future. "Relating to the kind of content that we produce, a lot of which is outdated Opera material, we often find ourselves restricted to specific time periods that in this day and age [can] act as discriminatory nuisances," said De Graaf.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, De Graaf pointed to a "disconnect when it comes to onstage versus backstage, which really causes problems when those onstage are put in administrative positions without proper training, as it's just assumed that both realms are similar enough to skip this process entirely."<sup>19</sup>

### ***Imago Theatre***

Imago Theatre's manifesto reads: "We are arms open, heads flung back, spinning catalysts. We are Kaleidoscopic words that ripple and tear down walls. We are daring feminists, creators and mentors. And we won't stop."<sup>20</sup>

Since its beginning, the company's mission has matured from one passionate about showcasing works from all around the world to one "centred around women's lived experiences."<sup>21</sup> Elodie LeGrand, current Board Member at Imago, explained, "Through production, they trigger reflection to have an impact on one person's perception."<sup>22</sup> This idea of depicting messages of social justice through theatre content is one that fortunately many contemporary theatre companies are choosing to adopt, including the aforementioned BTW. Among the issues Imago covers is child sex tourism in Montreal, an issue LeGrand is passionate about combatting. However, she insists that Imago adds a new element to the mix by not only "[using] theatre to bring light to real human issues, [but also] then [leaving] room for discussion."<sup>23</sup> This is a reference to Imago's regular talkback series presented after the conclusion of every production. It allows for "meaningful exchange with audience members [...], [featuring] a guest speaker from the Montreal community invited to offer a unique lens on

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> De Graaf, "Savoy Interview".

<sup>20</sup> Imago Theatre, *Our Manifesto* (Montreal: Imago Theatre, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Elodie LeGrand, "Imago Theatre Interview" (Montreal: Imago Theatre, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

themes and [the] subject matter of the play.”<sup>24</sup> In this way, Imago builds partnerships with the local community, and creates an efficient and direct method of involving audiences in developing solutions to problems. LeGrand also highlighted the value of having a Board of Directors with diverse backgrounds, which she describes as a key indicator that members are in touch with the realities of the community.

In terms of challenges facing Imago, LeGrand emphasized the importance of Board stabilization, something that the Imago Board has been struggling with over the past few years. In particular, she pointed to the importance of Board education and having an advocacy strategy, both of which she believes could help avoid recurring issues.

### ***Repercussion Theatre & A Company of Fools***

The arts are often perceived as luxury activities that the average population simply cannot afford to be involved in, consequently furthering justification for their neglect in policy circles. Performance art and theatre in particular have negative reputations. However, the truth is that when it comes to local initiatives of the non-profit sort, accommodations for affordability and thus accessibility often take priority, with the result being a powerful growth in social connectedness.

Such is the case with Repercussion Theatre and A Company of fools, two theatre companies located in Montreal and Ottawa, respectively, with the mission of bringing Shakespeare to the local masses. Despite being located in different Canadian cities and having no administrative or organizational connection, both companies play vital roles in building social connectedness through accessibility in their respective communities. They achieve this through the production of unique renditions of *Shakespeare in the Park*, organized in a tour-like setting around different neighbourhoods. The tours themselves contribute to the element of accessibility behind both companies' philosophies. For example, park locations are selected by A Company of Fools to ensure that many people “live within a 10 minute walk of a Torchlight Shakespeare performance.”<sup>25</sup> Further, Catriona Leger, artistic director of the company, adds that all performances are 'pass the hat', which she describes as “a great way to make sure

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<sup>24</sup> Imago, *Our Manifesto*.

<sup>25</sup> Catriona Leger, "A Company of Fools Interview" (Ottawa: A Company of Fools, 2017)



everyone can come [...] If you can get to a park, you can see the show because it is after all by donation."<sup>26</sup>

Shayne Lovsin-Couture, marketing and communications coordinator at Repercussion, reveals a similar story, explaining that "all of [their shows] are free to the general public" and that "it is [their] way of promoting culture and a sense of community."<sup>27</sup> In terms of the importance of bringing theatre, and in particular Shakespeare, to communities, Couture truly believes that "while [Shakespeare] is an old text, a lot of the themes he discusses are still very relevant and timeless. It's a way for audiences to think about their world and reflect and either take action or start a conversation."<sup>28</sup> Ultimately, making such intellectually stimulating themes readily available to the population, coupled with the comfort of companionship through spectatorship, is extremely powerful in forming bonds among performers and audiences alike.

Unfortunately, however, Leger reveals that many of these 'accessible' artistic groups in Ontario face financial adversity, with resources being insufficient to maintain the livelihoods of administrators within the company. Some must seek other work to supplement their income.<sup>29</sup> This inhibits the ability of the company to grow, as staff are unable to fully dedicate themselves. Part of the solution involves re-allocation of government funding to these kinds of local, non-profit initiatives.

## **GOVERNMENT FUNDING AVENUES FOR COMMUNITY ACTORS**

Serious socio-economic and government support for the arts in Canada did not emerge until the drafting of *The Massey Report* in 1951.<sup>30</sup> This document sought to encourage the federal government to take significant steps towards institutionalizing and legitimizing the arts as a discipline. In particular, reforms in education and the professional industry were proposed, including better funding of arts university programs and the development of a "Canada Council

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<sup>26</sup> Leger, "Fools Interview".

<sup>27</sup> Shayne Lovsin-Couture, "Repercussion Theatre Interview" (Montreal: Repercussion Theatre, 2017).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Leger, "Fools Interview".

<sup>30</sup> Jocelyn Harvey, "Canada Council for the Arts" *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (Canada: McClelland & Stewart, 2011).

for the Arts."<sup>31</sup> Since these initial steps were implemented, however, government support for Canadian arts and culture has leveled out, and in recent years decreased significantly.

### ***The Canada Council for the Arts***

In Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts acts as the federal government's primary artistic corporation in charge of providing funding and resources to the country's national arts.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the Council is most often the first point of contact for individual artists, groups, and organizations when it comes to obtaining financial support from the Canadian Government, in conjunction with each province's respective local and provincial arts council entities. The Council operates under the leadership of a Board of Directors made up of eleven members, including a Chair, a Vice Chair, and nine others from across the nation who meet at least three times a year in order to make decisions pertaining to policy, programming, budgeting and grants.<sup>33</sup> In its annual *Canada Council Funding and External Statistics* report for the 2015-2016 term, it was recorded that the Council had awarded 2,219 grants to organizations across all ten provinces and three territories, totaling \$144.6 million in program spending.<sup>34</sup> During the previous term, the total was \$143.6 million allocated, and in the 2013-2014 term it was \$142.1 million.<sup>35</sup>

The Council prides itself on operating in the spirit of 'public accountability', undertaking regular reporting to Parliament through the Minister of Canadian Heritage and offering Canadians frequent opportunities to engage in both formal and informal discussion. In terms of formal discussion, an 'Annual Public Meeting' is held wherein "members of the public and the arts community are invited to participate in person, or via livestream and social media channels."<sup>36</sup> Informal discussion also occurs year-round via written mail, email, and online platforms.

Public accountability is also meant to be incorporated into the Council's decision-making process. For example, decisions on the merit of applications and allocation of grants are made

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Canada Council for the Arts. *Annual Report 2015-2016* (Ottawa: Federal Government of Canada, 2016), 29

<sup>34</sup> Canada Council, *Annual Report*, 23.

<sup>35</sup> Canada Council for the Arts. "Stats and Stories" *Research, Evaluation and Performance Measurement* (Ottawa: Federal Government of Canada, 2017).

<sup>36</sup> Canada Council, *Annual Report*, 30.

by peer assessment committees comprised of artists and arts professionals “who have the experience, knowledge and open-mindedness to make a fair and expert evaluation.”<sup>37</sup> They are, “respected and credible within their artistic community or field (and scholarly communities in the case of prizes) and have professional experience and knowledge related to the assessment criteria and the types of applications or nominations submitted.”<sup>38</sup> Following this evaluation, committees share their findings with the Council in the form of priority listings and granting advice, providing the foundation for the Board to ultimately make a final, well-informed decision.

### ***Varied Provincial and Municipal Funding***

The arts also have unique micro-governing counterparts at provincial and municipal levels that serve the needs of their respective regional populations. Through such entities, local organizations can further their odds of obtaining government funding for their artistic endeavours.

In Ontario, for example, the main provincial governing body of the arts is the Ontario Arts Council (OAC), an arm's length agency of the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. The OAC's mission statement is to “foster the creation and production of art for the benefit of all Ontarians.”<sup>39</sup> Similar to the Canada Council for the Arts, the OAC also operates under the direction of a 12-member volunteer Board representing different communities of the province, as well as several internal governing entities that work to ensure transparency and accountability.<sup>40</sup> Between 2015 and 2016, it was reported that the OAC had allocated a total of 3,586 grants totaling \$50.5 million to 1,125 organizations across Ontario.<sup>41</sup>

Another provincial example is Quebec's Conseil des Arts et des Lettres (CALQ), which works to “support, throughout Quebec, creation, experimentation, production and dissemination in the realms of visual arts, the arts and crafts, literature, the performing arts, the multidisciplinary arts, cinema and video, the digital arts and architectural research.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Canada Council for the Arts. "Selection of Peer Assessors" *How We Make Funding Decisions* (Ottawa: Federal Government of Canada, 2017).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ontario Arts Council. "Accountability and Governance" *About Us* (Toronto: Provincial Government of Ontario, 2017).

<sup>40</sup> Ontario Council, "Accountability and Governance".

<sup>41</sup> Ontario Arts Council, *Annual Report 2015-2016* (Toronto: Provincial Government of Ontario, 2016), 25.

<sup>42</sup> Conseil des Arts et des Lettres du Quebec, "Who Are We?" *About* (Quebec: Provincial Government of Quebec, 2017).

Under very much the same organizational structure as its Ontario counterpart, in 2016, CALQ reported allocating a total of \$90.8 million in grants to 813 professional groups and 1,188 individual artists and writers across Quebec; \$3 million more than the previous year.<sup>43</sup>

While the City of Ottawa's Arts Council may not provide direct financial assistance, it is a helpful resource for Ottawa artists nonetheless, offering valuable insight on resources that can indeed provide funding. By providing thorough information on local, provincial, and federal funding agencies, the Ottawa Council aims to “[support] artists and arts organizations through leadership, guidance and the provision of opportunities to advance [their] local creative potential.”<sup>44</sup>

In contrast, the City of Montreal operates its local arts support network through the Conseil des arts de Montreal, whose mission is to “[support] and [recognize] excellence and innovation in the creation, production and dissemination of the arts.”<sup>45</sup> In practice, the Conseil provides information on how to gain access to multilevel funding opportunities, and on direct project and biennial/quadrennial operating grants available to local Montreal artists and collectives.<sup>46</sup>

## **POLITICAL CONTEXT**

Over the past decade, the arts sector in Canada was significantly impacted by changing government policies. In 2008, the Conservative federal government announced a \$45 million budget cut to Canada’s arts and cultural sector.<sup>47</sup> In defending the decision, the government stated that it “must walk ‘a fine line’ between providing financial stability and ‘funding things that people actually don't want.’”<sup>48</sup> This was of course partly in reference to arts and culture programs, which the government dismissed as “government spending without any resulting

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<sup>43</sup> Conseil des Arts et des Lettres du Quebec, *Raport Annuel de Gestion 2015-2016* (Quebec: Provincial Government of Quebec, 2016), 6.

<sup>44</sup> Ottawa Arts Council, "Mandate and Vision" *Who Are We* (Ottawa: Ottawa Council for the Arts, 2017).

<sup>45</sup> Conseil des Arts de Montreal, *Mission and Actions* (Montreal: City of Montreal, 2017).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> James Bradshaw, "Harper plays populist tune on arts cuts" *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto: The Globe and Mail Inc, September 11th, 2008).

<sup>48</sup> Bradshaw, "Arts Cuts".

improvement in government programming overall."<sup>49</sup> This controversial decision was likely driven by historical and outdated misconceptions about the arts as not being a legitimate aspect of societal productivity. In subsequent years, the Canadian arts and culture sector continued to suffer under budget cuts.

In 2015, the federal Liberals were elected on a platform that included plans to reform Canada's artistic agenda; but unfortunately, the country's micro non-profit sector has yet to witness any substantial change. For example, in 2016, the government announced that it would increase the Canada Council for the Arts' annual budget to double that of its existing budget of \$182 million, over 5 years.<sup>50</sup> Yet, many provincial and local actors remained starved for funding; as mentioned, the Quebec Conseil des Arts et des Lettres' budget was cut by \$2.5 million that same year.<sup>51</sup> Instead of dedicating funds to these actors who need it most — and who possess the most potential to build social connectedness in local communities — the federal government prioritized high-end commercial projects, such as the \$114 million renovation of the National Arts Centre in Ottawa.

A similar picture can be drawn at the provincial level. In 2015, the province of Quebec allocated most of its \$87.8 million budget, \$54.9 million, to the city of Montreal, while Quebec City received only \$5.2 million.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, the local Montreal non-profit organizations interviewed for this report continue to struggle financially and procure substantial government aid, suggesting that funding may not be being allocated optimally.

Ultimately, one finds the local non-profit arts sector in Canada today to be in a state of vulnerability, despite the societal and community benefits it provides. Unfortunately, it has become increasingly apparent that even recent strides towards preserving the arts have fallen short.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Sandra Abma, "Budget Boosts funding to Canada Council, CBC" *CBC News: Ottawa*. (Ottawa: CBC Radio-Canada, 2016).

<sup>51</sup> CBC News, "Quebec's \$2.5M arts funding could hurt creative community" *CBC News: Montreal*. (Montreal: CBC Radio-Canada, 2015).

<sup>52</sup> Conseil des Arts, *Rapport Annuel*, 88.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are a set of policy recommendations based on existing government policies as well as key findings acquired through outreach. The recommendations target different tiers of Canadian government, the Canadian public, and local artistic organizations, particularly of the non-profit variety.

### ***The Government of Canada***

In order to ensure that local organizations have access to better funding opportunities through grants and other forms of financial aid, the reform of current top-down approaches at the federal level in Canada are vital. Noting that the decrease of stigma around the arts at the policy level is a difficult task that will require the commitment of Canadian society as a whole, there are some steps that the government can take in the meantime. First, the federal government should ensure greater transparency in its governing agenda, particularly around funding and budgetary issues. Second, as suggested by LeGrand, it is important for the government to see the arts as a means of promoting education, creating opportunities for vulnerable persons to form community connections, and improve overall societal health. Further, arts programming rooted in education and awareness may actually have a ripple effect, reducing budgetary strains in other areas.

Third, there needs to be greater efforts made by the Board of Directors at the Canada Council for the Arts to familiarize themselves with small-scale local initiatives at both the provincial and municipal levels and reduce wasteful spending on existing high-income projects. A similar recommendation was offered by Linda Potter, Board Member at CityDance, a non-profit dance company located in Washington D.C. that specializes in facilitating youth member education as well as personal and professional development through the art of dance. She spoke candidly of the disconnect that often occurs with her own team when it comes to the relationship that they have with their participants as a result of differences in social class.<sup>53</sup> If the Council's Board included provincial representatives more familiar with their respective

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<sup>53</sup> Linda Potter, "CityDance Interview" (Washington D.C.: CityDance, 2017).

localities (6 out of 11 current Board members originate from Toronto and Montreal<sup>54</sup>), local initiatives might receive more attention and support. Additionally, the Board and other entities of artistic governance and leadership in the country should work towards the active inclusion of individuals with diverse backgrounds serving in their organizations. In so doing, projects with equally diverse content also stand a better chance at recognition.

Diversity at the provincial level is also important. Seeing as most local, non-profit organizations receive funding directly from their respective provinces — as a result of being too under-established, both in numbers and in seniority, to benefit from federal resources — provincial support is crucial in the funding process. In terms of Board representation in Ontario, 6 out of 10 members of the OAC's Board are from Toronto or the surrounding area. Once again, greater representation on Board and decision-making committees will ensure that diverse initiatives receive support.

Furthermore, provincial actors, such as CALQ, need to improve both in terms of accessibility and transparency so that valid recommendations from diversified voices can be made in the future. For example, taking the initiative to publish key documents in both English and French is crucial for data analysis (CALQ's Annual Report for 2015-2016 is only available in French). Additionally, revealing notable information, such as the base of origin of their Board Members is also important.

### ***The Canadian Public***

Individuals and communities in Canada can also make a difference in supporting their local artistic initiatives beyond financial support. Specifically, the practice of citizenship advocacy in favour of such projects can result in substantial change. Through actively participating in town hall initiatives, such as the Canada Council's Annual Public Meeting, and/or remaining vocal throughout the year by engaging local or provincial representatives, can also bring about positive changes.

There is also merit to being actively involved in local arts and theatre productions. Not only can individuals benefit from creative participation in terms of social connectedness, but

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<sup>54</sup> Canada Council for the Arts, *Annual Report 2015-2016* (Ottawa: Federal Government of Canada, 2016).

organizations themselves can grow, which in turn can reinforce their demands for increased government support.

### ***Local Non-Profit Organizations***

As outlined throughout this report, there exist a variety of limitations within the structural makeup of local non-profit initiatives themselves, all of which can stifle their ability to thrive and achieve their objectives. In the same way that government actors may experience a disconnect between administration and action, many local actors face similar challenges with their Boards and governing committees. As mentioned, an effective way of overcoming this issue is not only through diversification of Board membership, but also investment in Board education. For example, LeGrand detailed regular Board retreats at Imago, geared towards maintaining familiarization of current community realities at the governance level.<sup>55</sup>

Another disconnect is between the technical and creative spheres involved in production, which unfortunately often results in isolating experiences for some parties, as mentioned by De Graaf in her interview. Ultimately, the most efficient way to overcome this scenario is to improve transparency and communication among members. Whether in regulated meetings or informative collaboration, as long as concerns are being expressed in an active way, internalized frustrations that have the potential to disrupt creative journeys and connection can be avoided.

Finally, organizations need to remain empathetic to contemporary realities that affect marginalized members of their respective communities. And when they fail to do so, they must be held accountable. This relates to some of the problematic behaviour among local artistic entities that often goes unnoticed or unchallenged. From the 'scapegoat' issue raised in the BTW case,<sup>56</sup> to 'discriminatory nuisances' at Savoy,<sup>57</sup> it is the responsibility of organizations to educate their staffs and avoid undermining others.

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<sup>55</sup> LeGrand, "Imago Interview".

<sup>56</sup> Setshwaelo, "BTW Interview".

<sup>57</sup> De Graaf, "Savoy Interview".



## **CONCLUSION**

The arts are a critical vehicle to promote wellbeing among individuals, communities, and society. There is no denying the positive effects that creative outlets and forms of expression can have, particularly at the level of community. Whether through participation or spectatorship, the value of the arts in terms of building social connectedness can be seen clearly in the ability of grassroots initiatives to bring people together.

This report advocates for increased support of the arts in Canadian society, whether spearheaded by increases in government funding and/or catalyzed by the structural reorganization of non-profit, grassroots initiatives themselves. With collaborative effort, the artistic sector in Canada can be reformed to strengthen social connectedness through education, professional development, personal development (i.e. mental health), and enhanced accessibility.

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Artist Mentorship Program Coordinator at Black Theatre Workshop (BTW)  
Montreal, Quebec

Maia DeGraaf  
Former Lighting Designer at McGill Savoy Society (MSS)  
Montreal, Quebec

Elodie LeGrand  
Board Member at Imago Theatre  
Montreal, Quebec

Shayne Lovsin-Couture  
Marketing and Communications Coordinator at Repercussion Theatre  
Montreal, Quebec

Catriona Leger  
Artistic Director at A Company of Fools  
Ottawa, Ontario

Linda Potter  
Board Member at CityDance  
Washington, D.C.

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