



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des arts
du Canada

Canada Council for the Arts Equity Policy

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Equity Policy

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1. Preamble

I. Effective date

The Equity Policy is effective April 1, 2017.

II. Purpose

The Equity Policy of the Canada Council for the Arts (the Council) governs and supports the Council's application of equity principles and practices in all of its activities.

III. Objectives

The objectives of this policy are to contextualize and communicate the Council's equity principles and practices, and to support their implementation in all the Council's activities, including but not limited to policy and program development, strategic initiatives, communications and human resources.

IV. Authority and responsibility

Authority for the Equity Policy resides with the Director and CEO of the Council. Responsibility for implementation of the Policy is a shared function:

- ❖ The Director General, Strategy and Public Affairs is responsible for the development and implementation of the Policy, including through corporate policy development, communications and strategic initiatives.
- ❖ The Director General, Arts Granting Programs is responsible for the implementation of the Policy within granting programs and strategic funds and initiatives, and liaising with arts communities in matters regarding the Policy.
- ❖ The Chief Financial, Administration and Security Officer is responsible for ensuring that accommodations and all other outcomes related to the *Employment Equity Act*—including staff recruitment, training and retention—are appropriately met.

V. Approval and revisions to the Policy

Recommendations regarding the Equity Policy may be brought forward to the Senior Management Committee through the Director General, Strategy and Public Affairs. The Council's Director and CEO approves the Policy and any revisions or amendments to it.

2. Legislative context

As a federal Crown corporation, the Council's activities related to equity are governed by legislation and human rights instruments, including the:

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) which protects every Canadian's fundamental right to be treated equally under the law. Fundamental freedoms, democratic rights, mobility rights, legal rights, equality rights, linguistic rights and gender equality are protected. The Council's practice of equity is based on fundamental freedoms stated in Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms where every individual is equal under the law and has the right to equal benefit.

Canadian Human Rights Act (1985) which protects the principle that all individuals should have an opportunity equal with other individuals to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have and to have their needs accommodated, consistent with their duties and obligations as members of society, without being hindered in or prevented from doing so by discriminatory practices based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family status, genetic characteristics, disability or conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted or in respect of which a record suspension has been ordered.

Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1985) which characterizes Canada as a multicultural society and recognizes that all Canadians are free to protect, enhance and partake in their cultural heritage. It declares that multiculturalism is an essential characteristic to ensure equality between all Canadians and their respective communities of origin and will allow them to overcome barriers. This Act marks the government's recognition of the contributions ethnic groups have made to Canada and affirms that there is no official culture to which any Canadian must assimilate.

Official Languages Act (1985) which aims to ensure respect for English and French as the official languages of Canada. The Act ensures equality of status, equal rights and privileges as to their use in all federal institutions, including in communicating with or providing services to the public and in carrying out the work of federal institutions. This Act also supports the development of English and French linguistic minority communities and generally advances the equality of status and use of the English and French languages within Canadian society.

Employment Equity Act (1995) which was enacted to ensure equal opportunity in employment and promotion for sectors of the population that may be disadvantaged, including women, members of visible minorities, Indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities. These groups have been designated due to statistical evidence of disadvantage in employment as manifested in higher unemployment rates, wage gaps and a prevalence in low status occupations.

[Accessible Canada Act](#) (2019) which was enacted to benefit all persons, especially persons with disabilities, through the realization of a Canada without barriers, on or before January 1, 2040. Through the implementation of this Act, barriers will be identified and removed, and new barriers will be prevented in areas including employment, the built environment, and programs and services.

[United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#) (2021) which was enacted to affirm the Declaration as a universal international human rights instrument with application in Canadian law. It provides an implementation framework for healing and peace, as well as harmonious and cooperative relations based on the principles of justice, democracy, respect for human rights, non-discrimination and good faith. The rights and principles affirmed in the Declaration constitute the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of Indigenous peoples of the world, and must be implemented in Canada.

3. Equity: Principles and aspirations

1. Context

The Council understands equity as both a principle and a process that promotes just conditions for all persons to fully participate in society.

While all people have the right to be treated equally, not everyone experiences equal access to the same resources, opportunities or benefits. As a result, achieving equality is not simply about treating individuals or groups in the same way, but may require the use of specific measures to ensure fairness. The concept and practice of equity enables a person or organization to confront and address unjust situations by attempting to create the conditions that support true equality.

The Council recognizes that historical and persistent disadvantages are experienced by individuals within certain groups based on culture, ethnicity, language, race, religion, region, generation, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status and other characteristics.

Many of the inequities and injustices in Canadian society stem from systemic oppression, including colonialism, racism, white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. These inequities reinforce the exclusion and marginalization of Indigenous peoples, Black and racialized communities, resulting in deeply entrenched disadvantages, barriers and biases that continue to affect these groups and others.

Further, these systems prevent many people across Canada from meaningfully engaging in the arts. This impacts the health, wellbeing and sustainability of society as a whole.

Canadian institutions founded within these systems are governed by policies, practices and power relations that serve to reinforce privilege and further

disadvantage specific groups of people. Public institutions such as the Council therefore have a responsibility to understand, identify and address the way these systems are present in their organizations and play an active role in creating a more just and equitable future.

II. Principles and aspirations

The Council, in alignment with its organizational values and the legislation cited above, recognizes the individual worth and dignity of all people and actively opposes discrimination in all its forms.

The Council has and will continue to honour the commitments to self-determination and sovereignty it has made to Indigenous Nations and peoples.

The Council believes that all people deserve to benefit from a vibrant, accessible and diverse arts sector.

Through its role as a public arts funder, the Council aspires to contribute to a just and equitable society where the consequences of colonialism, racism, and other forms of oppression and exclusion have been eliminated.

The Council considers decolonization to be a fundamental part of its equity principles and practices, as well as a distinct commitment in its own right, and will continue the process to define and implement its own path forward.

The Council acknowledges that there are barriers (systemic or otherwise) to its programs and services faced by some individuals or organizations experiencing the disadvantages outlined above. The Council is committed to identifying and addressing historic and persistent barriers to access faced by underserved and marginalized groups in all regions of the country. This includes artists from Indigenous, Black, racialized, Deaf, disability, 2SLGBTQI+ and gender-diverse communities, women and artists at the intersections of these identities.

The Council recognizes that lived experiences are complex and that individuals may face multiple and distinct disadvantages and barriers in everyday life. The Council understands that social identities often overlap to create compounded barriers, requiring an intersectional approach to equity policies and practices.

In its commitment to social justice, the Council will continue to monitor and adapt in response to evolving equity concepts and practices, dialogues with communities, and data and research from internal and external sources.

All of the Council's work is guided by its [core organizational values](#). These values are rooted in humility, openness, listening and empathy, and include mutual trust, respect and reciprocity; shared leadership; curiosity and continuous learning; and the passion and care staff bring to their work to help build a more just, equitable and sustainable arts sector.

4. Strategic groups

Since 2017, the Council has used the term “designated priority group” to refer to communities for which it has implemented measures to address the historical and ongoing barriers they face in society and in accessing the Council’s funding, and/or to respond to the Council’s legislative obligations.

The Council supports Indigenous, racialized (formerly referred to as culturally diverse),¹ and Deaf and disability communities through targeted funding and initiatives, and it monitors and reports on funding to these groups annually through corporate reports. These activities also apply to official language minority communities in response to the Council’s obligations under Part VII of the *Official Languages Act*.

In alignment with its 2021-26 Strategic Plan, the Council uses the term “strategic group” to refer to the communities for which it has committed to improving access to funding, which includes Indigenous, Black, racialized, Deaf and disability, official language minority, and 2SLGBTQI+ and gender-diverse communities, women, youth and artists at the intersections of these groups. The Council tracks and monitors its funding to these groups through data gathered using the data collection mechanisms described below.

The Council will continue to improve and nuance its approaches to better address the distinct experiences of marginalized and underserved communities. In practice, this means that the mechanisms the Council develops will vary from community to community. The Council acknowledges that there is no adequate one-size-fits-all approach when addressing inequities, recognizing that different communities and groups face distinct challenges and barriers, and that these vary even within groups.

The Council also acknowledges that there are communities facing racism and other forms of discrimination that are not specifically identified as strategic groups, which in no way invalidates their lived experience. The Council is committed to better understanding how it can best serve all communities experiencing barriers to access.

5. Equity tools, practices and mechanisms

I. Collection and use of demographic data

¹ In 2017, the Council adopted the term “culturally diverse” to respectfully refer to people of African, Asian, Latin American, West or Central Asian, Pacific Islander, or mixed heritage that includes one or more of these groups who have been historically disadvantaged as a group and may experience discrimination based on colour, culture and race. Beginning in 2021—most notably in its 2021-26 Strategic Plan, *Art, now more than ever*—the Council adopted the term “racialized” to respectfully refer to the same communities. The Council is in the process of replacing the term “culturally diverse” with “racialized” across all its communications platforms, including its website, glossary, application portal and program forms and guidelines.

The Council collects demographic data to understand how different communities are accessing its programs and to inform its equity policies and practices. The information collected is used for the Council's internal monitoring and feeds into its corporate reports, such as the Corporate Scorecard.

The Council uses several tools to collect demographic data about applicants, peer assessors, and those nominated for or receiving prizes:

a) Voluntary self-identification form

The Council encourages applicants and peer assessors to complete a voluntary self-identification form to understand whether its programs are reaching a diverse range of Canadian artists. This form asks individuals for demographic information, including year of birth, place of birth, citizenship and immigration, gender identity, sexual orientation, linguistic diversity, Deaf and disability identity, First Nations, Inuit and Métis identity, and racial and ethnic identity.

The data collected is used to monitor the impact of and identify gaps in funding to applicants from various demographic groups. It is also used to track representation of individuals from various demographic groups on peer assessment committees.

The Council also uses a voluntary self-identification form for its employees and applicants to Council positions in order to understand and address trends in workforce demographics and respond to legislative requirements.

b) Identification for strategic funding

Creating an applicant profile is the first step in the application process for Council grants. Individuals, groups and organizations are asked to identify as belonging to one or more strategic groups in their applicant profile. Groups and organizations are also asked to confirm that they meet relevant criteria using the strategic groups attestation tool. The Council collects this information for analysis and reporting at an aggregate level, as well as to determine eligibility for strategic funding.

II. Funding mechanisms

The Council uses a number of funding mechanisms to ensure equitable delivery of grants, processes and services:

a) Dedicated funds

In 2017, the Creating, Knowing and Sharing program was launched—a permanent, dedicated funding program to support Indigenous individuals, groups, Indigenous-led arts organizations and arts/cultural sector development organizations that foster a vital and resilient Indigenous arts ecosystem.

First Nations, Inuit and Métis individuals, groups and organizations may apply to this dedicated program—or to any of the Council’s other programs—for funding for artistic and cultural activities. This program functions using a self-determined, Indigenous-centred approach, meaning that it is guided by Indigenous values and worldviews, administered by staff of First Nations, Inuit and Métis heritage, and assessed by First Nations, Inuit and Métis individuals.

Dedicated funds also exist for official language minority communities and are described in the Council’s Official Languages Policy.

b) Strategic investment provisions

The Council’s primary mechanism for directing funds through its granting programs towards Indigenous, racialized, and Deaf and disability communities is called a “strategic investment provision”. Applicants who self-identify through the Council’s applicant portal as belonging to one or more of these groups or communities may have an opportunity to access separate, additional funding envelopes.

With the use of strategic investment provisions, applicants (individuals, groups or organizations) that are well-assessed and self-identify in their applicant profile as belonging to at least one of these groups may be prioritized for Council funding from these additional funding envelopes. This mechanism enables the Council to address some of the barriers faced by marginalized and underserved communities.

In addition, strategic investment provisions are used to ensure that applicants who are receiving Council funding for the first time and applicants living in all regions of the country have equitable access to project funding. This funding mechanism can be used to support additional strategic priorities as these emerge.

III. Accessibility mechanisms and resources

Accessibility is one of the Council’s long-standing commitments and a foundational element of its vision for the future of the arts. The Council is committed to making its services and grants available to everyone and to meeting the accessibility standards defined by the Government of Canada. The Council’s [2023–25 Accessibility Plan](#) aims to eliminate barriers to accessibility and to prevent new ones from being created.

The Council is committed to ensuring access and participation through mechanisms that accommodate and facilitate access for people wishing to apply to and participate in the Council’s overall processes. Eligible applicants can request [Application Assistance](#), which contributes to costs for services to help applicants with the application process.

The Council’s [Access Support Fund](#) supports individuals who are Deaf, have

disabilities or who are living with mental illness, as well as Deaf and disability arts groups, collectives and organizations. Access Support grants provide a contribution towards costs for specific services and supports required to complete a project funded through a [Council grant program](#).

Beyond funding, the Council continues to develop resources that articulate the Council's support for Deaf and disability arts practices and communities. For instance, in 2019, the Council published its [Expanding the Arts II: Deaf and Disability Expression and Engagement Strategy](#) which is intended to support the expression and engagement of artists who are Deaf or have disabilities and of arts organizations across Canada that work with them.

IV. Assessment

Along with program design and strategic funding mechanisms, the Council strives for equitable funding outcomes through its selection of peer assessors and fair assessment processes.

To encourage the arts milieu to be more accessible and representative of Canada's diverse population, language is included throughout Council programs that reaffirm its commitment to equity. Impact-related assessment criteria outline the expectation and assessment of an applicant organization's commitment to Indigenous, racialized, Deaf and disability, and official language minority communities, and ask applicants to articulate a commitment to reflecting the diversity of the organization's geographic community or region. Equity-related assessment criteria also exist for many of the Council's prizes.

Peer assessment is the basis for the majority of the Council's decisions as to which artists, artistic projects and arts organizations receive funding (see the Council's Granting Policy). The Council engages peers that reflect the diversity of Canada's population, including artists and arts professionals who are Indigenous, Black, racialized, Deaf, disabled, 2SLGBTQI+, gender-diverse or from official language minority communities, as well as representative of different genders, regions and generations. The Council monitors the composition of its peer assessment committees on an annual basis to track the participation of peers who self-identify as belonging to one or more of these groups.

The Council makes use of [context briefs](#) on emerging, minoritized and less-understood arts communities and practices, and disseminates these to assessment committees. These briefs provide background information on historical and cultural contexts, help assessors understand and consider the barriers faced by different communities, and reinforce the Council's equity principles and practices.

V. Internal mechanisms

The Council's equity policies and practices inform all of the organization's work. A number of internal mechanisms are in place to support this work.

The Council is committed to building a skilled and diverse workforce that reflects the individuals and communities that it serves, including through targeted recruitment campaigns. The Joint Employment Equity Committee helps the Council implement the requirements of employment equity legislation in exemplary ways and adopt best practices to create and sustain a diverse workforce, ensuring that the organization's work is informed by the perspectives of individuals from marginalized and underserved communities.

The Council's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee guides, supports and promotes the Council's diversity and equity efforts, articulates a vision of diversity and equity for the Council, ensures that there is a consistent approach to internal and external communications, and contributes to the goal of providing optimal working conditions for all people working at the Council.

The staff-led Anti-Racism, Equity and Social Justice Committee provides a forum for staff to foster dialogue, share information, discuss ideas and propose solutions to help identify, address and prevent systemic barriers in the Council's programs, policies, operations and culture. The Committee is helping the Council to become more open and equitable through informed dialogue on decolonization, equity, anti-racism, anti-Black racism, intersectionality and social justice.

Further, the Council engages in research and analysis on equity-related subjects and provides training, developmental workshops and presentations on access, equity and diversity for staff and external stakeholders.

The Council also engages in dialogue and partnerships to influence and advance equity across agencies, regions and demographic groups.

6. Conclusion

The Council is committed to the vision of an arts sector that engages everyone and in which all Canadians see themselves reflected—an arts sector that makes a meaningful contribution to a more just society. The Council is committed to implementing its equity policies and practices with dedication and care, recognizing that this task is at once urgent as well as a long-term endeavour.

Approved by Executive Management Committee on April 11, 2017; updated by Senior Management Committee on December 19, 2023.