



CANADA COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS

Qualitative Impact Framework
Summary of Sector Consultations

Introduction

The Canada Council for the Arts (the Council) has been working with WolfBrown to develop a framework for measuring the intrinsic¹ and qualitative impacts of its funding on the arts sector and on Canadian society. This work will allow the Council to set out a systematic approach to gathering evidence in relation to a wide range of impacts in order to tell a more complete story of the value of the its funding.

Having settled on an initial Impact Framework, the Council has consulted with a wide range of stakeholders to gain perspective on the Framework's theoretical model and to identify the potential for it to be applied in the field. The consultations were completed in three phases:

1. In the first round of consultations we spoke with four municipal/regional arts agencies, five provincial funders, and one private foundation participated in one-hour videoconferences/phone interviews. Findings from these interviews are captured in the Phase 2A report "*Preliminary Stakeholder Consultations*" (December 2018).
2. The second round of consultations invited feedback from seventeen national arts service organizations and eight other alliances with a stake in research and/or impact assessment (which we refer to collectively as "allies"). These conversations were held through a mix of in-person interviews and focus groups held in Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto. Key takeaways from these consultations may be found in the Phase 2B report "*Consultations with NASOs and Allies*" (March 2019).

¹ "Intrinsic" is used to describe impacts that are inherent to the cultural experience, as opposed to positive spillover effects that the arts produce in other fields (e.g., economic impact, health benefits, etc.), which are often collectively referred to as "instrumental" impacts.

3. The third round of consultations consisted of thirty exploratory interviews with artistic and administrative staff of a sample of Council-funded organizations in Halifax, Quebec City, and Vancouver. These conversations are the subject of the Phase 3 report “*Exploratory Interviews with Funded Organizations*” (August 2019).

The present report summarizes findings from all three phases of consultation. Based on this work, the consultants are proposing a plan for implementing the Framework over the coming years.

Key Findings from Consultations with Arts Funders

Framework is seen as robust and useful

Respondents were impressed with the intellectual rigor and sophistication of the Framework, and they were generally enthusiastic about the work. Many found that the Framework sheds light on issues that they themselves are currently wrestling with.

Canada Council’s leadership is valued

Many of the interviewees commended the Canada Council for taking on this challenge, and see the Council’s interest in this area as particularly significant, since, as the national funding agency, it could play a particular role in the following areas:

- Leadership and agenda setting;
- Commissioning long-term studies and foundational research that exceed the capacity of municipal and provincial funders;
- Knowledge dissemination; and,
- Convening stakeholders.

Reception in the field may be uneven

Funders’ opinions were mixed on the extent to which the grantees would want (or be able) to participate in impact research. While organizational leaders are curious about their impact, Council should be cautious about the capacity of organizations to participate as research partners.

Other funders are exploring similar issues

Several other arts funders have developed (or are in the process of developing) impact frameworks that primarily rely on quantitative measures. Several are exploring ways to expand and systematize their use of qualitative data.

There are many opportunities for partnership

All of the arts funders that were consulted are interested in continuing the conversations about impact with Council and exploring possible partnerships. Some interviewees expressed an interest in collaborating where interests align, rather than trying to replicate all components of the research across all geographies. There might be different types of partnerships (e.g. funding partnerships to jointly commission



research) and research partnerships (to implement studies in multiple geographies simultaneously).

Key Findings from Consultations with NASOs and “Allies”

Perspectives of NASOs and “Allies” aligned with Arts Funders’ on key points

The second round of consultation confirmed much of what we heard from arts funders. There was widespread praise for the Framework overall, and there was general agreement about the need to tell more compelling stories about the impact of the arts. Several of the consultees expressed an interest in partnering. The NASOs and other allies also echoed the funders’ assessment that adoption/participation among organizations would likely be uneven due to different notions of “impact” across disciplines as well as widespread capacity concerns.

Current sector-wide research initiatives

While several recent and ongoing research initiatives explore impact, they are generally focused on quantitative measures. Despite a desire to do more, recent efforts to include qualitative measures have been small-scale, exploratory endeavors. Some interesting research on community impacts has been conducted by Official Language Minority Communities (OLMC) service organizations.

Impacts of individual artists

Opinions here were mixed about the extent to which individual artists should be involved in impact assessment. Some participants argued for a greater focus on individual artists in the Framework and potentially giving artists a role in the research. One interviewee in particular emphasized that individual artists can have a “civic impact” akin to that of arts organizations, and argued that this should be captured in the Framework. However, there were also concerns about whether artists should be burdened with demonstrating their impact, and whether they should be thinking about impact at all.

Importance of maintaining a “firewall” between impact research and individual granting decisions at Council

There were initial concerns about using impact data to evaluate grantee performance, which dissipated once consultees were informed that there would be a “firewall” between research (impact measurement) on the one hand, and peer assessment on the other. This highlights the importance of emphasizing up front that the Framework will not be used as part of the peer evaluation process in all publications flowing from this work.

Framework is based on a colonial model

Opinions were divided on whether Indigenous artists and perspectives would be best articulated by a parallel, Indigenous-led research initiative (as currently planned). One respondent pointed out that the Framework is rooted in a colonial mindset (the same mindset on which CCA was built in the 1950s) as is evident, for instance, in the privileging of “professionalism.” Interviewees therefore endorsed an Indigenous-led



research equivalent on impact assessment. There was also a suggestion put forth that the Indigenous spirit of self-determination guide the whole project. It was noted that a committee would be necessary to guide an Indigenous-led research effort due to the variety of Indigenous perspectives.

Framework needs to be accessible

Several respondents noted that practitioners in the field, whether cultural workers or artists, are unlikely to take the time to digest such a theoretical and complex report. In order to engage readers who are not steeped in the technical language of research and evaluation, the Framework needs to be presented in a more straightforward and accessible manner. We sought to address this concern in advance of the third wave of consultations (with arts organizations) by creating a succinct webpage introduction to the Framework, along with a “placemat” visual. A number of consultees emphasized the importance of “animating” the research findings, so that they become a part of the active discourse and practice in the field instead of languishing in seldom-read pdf reports. Some felt it would be important that the data is made publicly available, so that other researchers can examine regional or discipline-specific trends.

Key Findings from Consultations with Funded Organizations

Desire to demonstrate impact more effectively

Organizations welcomed the conversations about impact that Council is seeking to advance. There is widespread agreement that the sector needs to be able to communicate the impact that individual organizations (and the arts in general) make in society. There is interest in exploring civic and community impacts, harnessing the power of anecdotal evidence, and demonstrating the impact that organizations have on artists’ careers. Some are also interested in exploring long term impacts. Not surprisingly, there was less discussion of in-depth research like neurological studies, or sociological inquiries into taste formation and meaning making, which would have less obvious direct practical applications.

“Impact” is often misunderstood

The Framework assumes that all artistic work has “impacts” of various sorts, whether or not they are intended. However, in our consultations with organizations, we found that most conflate the term “impact” with social, educational, or health “outcomes” that are the intended result of specific, goal-oriented programs. Several of the interviewees (particularly the larger institutions) thought of “impact” only in relation to their outreach programs, which explicitly try to effect social outcomes of one sort or another. Few discussed the impact of their core artistic programming, which is the primary focus of the Framework.

Organizational leaders have an “intuitive” understanding of their audience impact through informal observation

Many organizational leaders have a nuanced sense of their intrinsic impact based on informal channels: observing visitors as they walk through the galleries, listening in



on conversations during or after events, watching audiences respond to a performance, or getting unsolicited feedback from patrons. The challenge for them lies in documenting and communicating these perceptions. A few organizations have put formal structures in place to capture and make use of this observational data. Many more would like to capture and use this information more effectively, but they don't know how to approach it from a methodological standpoint, nor do they have the capacity to undertake the research.

Most organizations need help to conceptualize and articulate their impact

When prompted, interviewees articulated several different aspects of their organizations' impact, including the pivotal role they play in sustaining the local or region arts ecosystem, supporting local artists through artist residencies, workshops, internships and training programs, and their impact on their creative practice (whether sustaining traditional practices or advancing the field through innovation). Without such prompting it wasn't clear that they had an instinct to talk about impact in a systematic coherent way, nor had they clearly conceptualized the various types of impact they have. Some were quite clear that they think about impact only in relation to complying with reporting requirements imposed by funders. When organizations collect data on the impact of their artistic programs, it is primarily used for marketing purposes and not to inform the larger vision/entity of the organization.

Research must generate immediate, tangible benefits for organizations

The general interest in impact research among organizations was tempered by the caveat that the capacity to participate in such research is limited to nonexistent. While many of the interviewees were *intellectually* curious about exploring their impact more deeply, and thought the Framework would be useful to them, most said it would be difficult for them to build internal support and commit resources to the research without a clear vision of how this work would benefit their organization.

Takeaways & Next Steps

There is much to be gained by advancing the discussion of intrinsic impact within the Canadian arts sector. By taking a leadership role in a nation-wide conversation Council could increase the sector's ability to consider, articulate and demonstrate its impact. This will enhance their grant reports, their effectiveness, and the value they provide to the Canadian public. It will also enable the Council to present the impact of its investments and the value of public funding for the arts.

In response to these consultations we are revising the Framework and developing an implementation plan that will comprise a number of research and communications initiatives over the next few years.

