



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des arts
du Canada



Canada Council for the Arts

Qualitative Impact Framework

Prepared by WolfBrown team



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Executive Summary

Introduction

Worldwide, there is increased interest in measuring the impact of the arts. Governments seek to measure the impacts of their investments of public dollars. Arts agencies at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels strive to spend limited resources in the most appropriate ways. Cultural organizations want to understand and maximize the impact of their work on their communities.

This interest has developed relatively recently, fuelled by a desire amongst policymakers to hold public arts funders accountable, and also by a desire amongst arts leaders to forge a deeper understanding of how art affects people and communities. The Canada Council for the Arts commissioned this work in order to better understand its impact, but also to better articulate the many ways in which Canadians' lives are enhanced by the arts. The Council sought a holistic framework that reflects the full range of *intrinsic* impacts produced as a result of its investments, which can then be researched and substantiated with *qualitative* methods.

'Qualitative' research analyzes data that is not numerical. It can be used to capture someone's experience at an arts program, often in his or her own words. Qualitative data helps to tell a deeper story than statistics alone would allow. It gets at questions of "how" and "why".

'Intrinsic' refers to the inherent and idiosyncratic impacts of arts activities arising directly from the aesthetic experience. Intrinsic benefits can be immediate or long-term.

'Instrumental' in this context refers to the way in which something contributes to other, non-intrinsic outcomes - usually economic or social. The cultural sector often makes claims about the instrumental impact it has - e.g. improving test scores, reducing crime or enhancing community development.

Our focus on intrinsic impacts and qualitative methods will complement the well-established quantitative measures of economic impact, health benefits, and other so-called "instrumental" impacts (i.e., arts as an instrument of achieving some other goal).

The Impact Framework is intended to:

- provide the Canada Council with a blueprint for gathering evidence of the impact of its investments in artists and organizations;
- support artists and organizations to understand and articulate the impact of *their* work;
- support critical self-reflection and inform the Canada Council's future strategic decision making;
- forge partnerships to deepen the sector's understanding of the impact of the arts in the short term and long term.

In summary, the Impact Framework will help the Canada Council tell a richly textured and rigorously researched story about how its investments strengthen Canada's arts ecosystem and benefit the breadth and diversity of the Canadian public. The framework focuses on the impact that the Canada Council generates both through its grant programs and strategic commitments. It will not be used to assess the work of the artists and organizations the Council funds, or influence the decisions of peer assessment committees.

The Council wants to understand the impact of a five-year doubling of its parliamentary appropriation (2016–2021).

To begin with, WolfBrown pursued several strands of research into the concept of impact and various measurement approaches used elsewhere in the world. This includes research on:

- concepts of public value;
- impact measurement frameworks;
- Quebec and Franco-Canadian perspectives on impact;
- Indigenous-led perspectives on impact;
- qualities of civically engaged arts organizations;
- community-level impacts;
- impacts on individuals.

Drawing on those research insights, we developed an initial draft of the Framework which was revised and refined based on extensive consultations with arts organizations, funders and arts support organizations, as well as input from the Advisory Committee.

The Framework recognizes that impacts occur on a *continuum of attribution* by distinguishing between

Upstream - impacts most directly related to the Council's funding (e.g. the immediate benefits to funded artists and organizations)

Downstream - impacts that result from the work of funded artists and organizations and may be attributed to numerous causes, including but not limited to the Council's funding (e.g. impacts on audiences and communities)

upstream and *downstream* impacts. Upstream impacts are those most directly related to the Council's funding – such as increased capacity of artists and organizations. Downstream impacts result from peoples' experience of the art. The Council cannot take full credit for the impact of the work on audiences and communities as it is clear that grantees' successes belong to many people and many funders.

Looking only at downstream impacts, such as the immediate impact of an event on audience members, misses the larger picture and greater understanding

that comes from looking at a complex ecosystem. Similarly, examining only the upstream impacts risks losing sight of the power of the arts to provoke, move and inspire people in very tangible ways.

Ultimately, the story of the Canada Council's intrinsic impact can be understood as an intertwining set of narratives stemming from its portfolio of grant programs and strategic commitments.

Five impact areas are described over the following pages, along with sources of evidence and some sample research questions for each.

To be clear, the Canada Council does not plan to measure and research *all* of the potential impacts identified in the Framework. Rather, in advancing this broad conceptual framework, the Council wants to explore how its investments in research might intersect with academic studies and other impact assessment initiatives (including the work of partner organizations) in contributing to a fuller understanding of intrinsic impact.

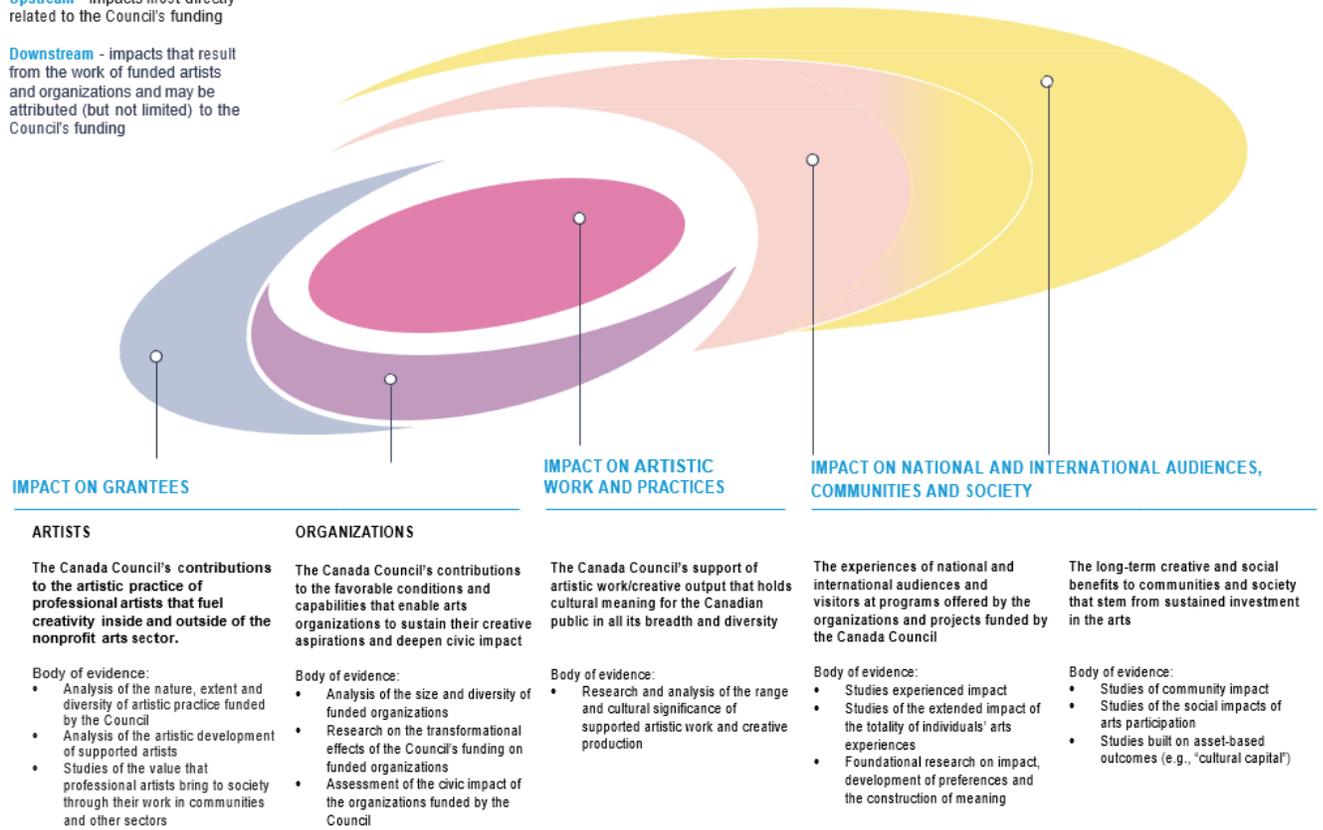
Overview of the Impact Areas

The framework recognizes different types of impacts by distinguishing them between upstream and downstream impacts in five areas.

Upstream - impacts most directly related to the Council's funding

Downstream - impacts that result from the work of funded artists and organizations and may be attributed (but not limited) to the Council's funding

The Canada Council for the Arts commissioned WolfBrown team - Alan Brown, John Carnwath and James Doeser, to create a custom-made framework to suit the complexity of the Canadian arts ecology.



Impact on Grantees



Impact Area 1: The Canada Council's contributions to the artistic practices of professional artists that fuel creativity inside and outside of the nonprofit arts sector

Since its founding, the Canada Council has supported the work of thousands of professional artists, and the public has benefited from the richness and diversity of their work. The Council also recognizes that it is still addressing historical barriers for some groups of artists (e.g. Indigenous, culturally diverse, Deaf and disabled, and official language minority communities) to achieve their full creative potential. Like the funding of organizations, the funding of creative projects is an upstream source of impact.

While artists benefit financially in the short term from the funding of their projects, the impact of their creative activity might play out over many years, or even a lifetime, and might take different forms. Artistic ideas that spin out of the funded works might evolve and bear fruit well beyond the

grant period. Likewise, these projects impact other artists and organizations and the investment in this funded work might pay dividends well into the future.

Evidence of this area of impact would be found in:

1. **The nature, extent and diversity of artistic practice supported by the Council**
 - *How does Council funding ensure the vitality of artistic practice across the many cultures and artistic disciplines of interest to Canadian and international publics?*
 - *How does Council funding allow for continuous experimentation and innovation in artistic practice and cultural production?*
 - *What is the impact of equitable access to the arts for official language minority communities, Indigenous peoples, immigrants, ethnic or racialized minorities, Deaf and disabled people, and other equity-seeking groups?*

2. **An analysis of the artistic development of supported artists**
 - *What is the impact of different types of project support (e.g. grants for the creation and production of new work, residencies, touring support, etc.)?*
 - *How does the Council's investment in artists' projects inspire and inform the artistic sector?*
 - *Do organizations draw on the pool of artistic creation developed through the Council's support to individual artists?*
 - *What is the larger ecosystem of support for these projects, including support provided by Council-funded organizations?*

3. **The value that professional artists bring to society through their work in communities and other sectors**
 - *To what extent are artists able to bring their artistic sensibility, skills and resources to bear in work in their communities?*
 - *What benefits do artists bring to other sectors including creative industries? What do employers and leaders in other sectors value about working with artists?*



Impact Area 2: The Canada Council's contributions to the favorable conditions and capabilities that enable arts organizations to sustain their creative aspirations and deepen their civic impact

In funding many hundreds of organizations, the Canada Council aims to create the favorable conditions under which the funded organizations can flourish and the arts sector as a whole can reflect the full spectrum of artistic expression. This is an upstream, or immediate, source of impact.

Evidence of this area of impact would be found in:

1. **The size and diversity of the cohort of funded organizations**
 - *What story does the portfolio of funded organizations tell of Canada's cultural output?*
 - *How does the Council's funding distribution across different dimensions (e.g. art forms, geographies, organizational size and type) nurture the ecosystem as a whole?*

- *What does the pattern of investment across the Council's multiple objectives (e.g. artistic exploration, sector development, preservation of traditional art forms/customary practices) tell us?*
2. **The effects of the Council's funding on supported organizations**
 - *What are the tangible effects of the Canada Council's funding on organizations in terms of their programming, operations and overall vision?*
 - *What is the significance of multi-year support for funded organizations, above and beyond the grant amount? How is this manifested (e.g. through tangible results such as programming, public outreach and work conditions, or more intangible benefits such as long-term planning, leveraging of other funds and ability to collaborate)?*
 - *In what ways, if any, do organizations evolve or adapt in response to funding criteria from the Canada Council?*
 3. **The civic impact of the Canada Council-supported organizations**
 - *What are the structural, cultural and programmatic building blocks of civic impact? How is "civic impact" understood differently in different contexts (e.g. rural, urban, regional)?*
 - *Do organizations use Canada Council funding to operationalize a commitment to civic impact? If so, how?*
 - *How can the Council lead this conversation to deepen awareness and capacity around notions of community and citizenship with funded organizations?*
 - *How do organizations' beliefs about their civic contributions compare with the value that their communities see in them? (This inquiry might be pursued in conjunction with the first point in impact area 5.)*

Impact on Artistic Work and Practices



Impact Area 3: The Canada Council's support of artistic work/creative output that holds cultural meaning to the Canadian public in all its breadth and diversity

Each year, artists and organizations funded by the Canada Council create a large body of artistic work. This work takes myriad forms, including film, art exhibits, installations, new choreographies, compositions and literary works, new adaptations of classics, customary practices, digital art and a wide array of other aesthetic expressions.

The impact of this work is reflected in its enduring meaning or resonance to people and communities, and in the ways the work influences future artistic work. This source of impact lies across a spectrum of the attribution continuum. In some cases, the work can be traced back to Canada Council funding, while in other cases the relationship is very indirect.

Evidence of this area of impact would be found in:

1. **The range and cultural significance of supported artistic work/creative output**
 - *To what extent do the funded works, including prizes, represent and engage the Canadian public?*

- *To what extent do Canada Council-funded works represent cultural touch points or create lasting impacts on cultural awareness, and inform collective memories of distinct communities in Canada?*
- *How do different contexts (e.g. cultural, generational) bring specificity of meaning across this body of work?*
- *How can this work broker meaningful conversations between different cultural understandings?*
- *How do investments in circulation, touring and distribution of original work influence the evolution of the work itself and its cultural significance?*

Impact on National and International Audiences, Communities and Society



Impact Area 4: The experiences of national and international audiences and visitors at programs offered by the Canada Council-funded organizations and projects

This is a more downstream area of impact. Many factors beyond Canada Council funding contribute to the number and quality of public presentations an organization is able to offer, and many situational and contextual factors influence how audience members receive the work. However direct or indirect the link, the Canada Council fulfills its responsibility when people enjoy and find meaning in the programs of its grant recipients.

When we discuss the impact of arts programs on individuals, it is helpful to distinguish between three types of impact:

- **Concurrent impact**, which happens during the experience
- **Experienced impact**, which shows up hours or days after the event
- **Extended impact**, where the impacts of individual events accumulate over time

A lot of recent research has focused on measuring experienced impact. But, in preparing this framework, we have come to believe that the larger challenge – and the greatest potential reward – lies in developing stronger theoretical frameworks and measurement approaches for understanding extended impact. These frameworks would articulate how individuals construct a larger narrative from their arts experiences, how this narrative contributes to their quality of life, and what role an agency like the Canada Council plays in supporting those experiences.

Understanding the long-term impacts of arts participation will require ongoing commitments to research, an unprecedented level of international collaboration across scholarly fields and between practitioners and researchers, a high degree of intellectual honesty, and financial resources that are beyond the capacity of any single agency or funder.

Evidence of this area of impact would be found in:

1. **Studies of concurrent impact**

- *How does the concurrent experience of artistic works shape our cognitive and emotional responses? How does it affect our real or perceived relationships with others in attendance?*
- *How do neurological and physiological responses to creative work (in creation as well as reception) differ from responses to other activities? Can we isolate what makes arts experiences different from other activities?*

2. Studies of experienced impact

- *How do different kinds of artistic programs create different kinds of impact? What patterns can be established?*
- *How is impact affected by situational factors such as venue, access, or presentation format?*
- *How is impact shaped by the cultural context in which the work is experienced? Does the same work produce distinct impacts when shown in different regions and communities across Canada and internationally?*
- *How do audience engagement techniques influence experienced impact?*
- *How might organizations extend or prolong the impact of their programs?*
- *Does marketing language affect how audiences experience art?*
- *What conditions lead to “peak experiences?”*

3. Studies of the extended impact of the totality of individuals’ arts experiences

- *What do Canadians value about the arts? What role do arts and culture play in their lives?*
- *Do findings confirm what arts organizations themselves believe to be offering the public in terms of meaning and worth?*
- *Do the relationships that arts participants develop with particular works of art, artists, arts organizations and art forms over time differ from other products and experiences?*
- *How and why do habits of arts consumption (or non-consumption) evolve over time?*

4. Foundational research on impact, development of preferences and the construction of meaning

- *What explains why some people are attracted to certain art forms, but not others?*
- *What do people recall of their artistic experiences? Why do some experiences create indelible memories, while others quickly fade?*
- *How do people “make sense” of their artistic experiences? How does interpretation inform the process of meaning making?*
- *What kinds of educational or enrichment activities magnify impact?*
- *How do preferences, familiarity and reputation influence our responses to works of art? How and why do tastes change over time?*
- *What is meaningful about arts programs? How does meaning differ across populations with different backgrounds?*
- *Does impact influence likelihood of future attendance?*
- *How significantly do social constructs influence attendance and repeat attendance?*



Impact Area 5: The long-term creative and social benefits to communities and society that stem from sustained investment in the arts

Many studies have shown that when people participate in the arts, society benefits. When people are more connected, they experience general feelings of wellbeing and a sense of belonging in their communities, and can even be more creative at work. Existing studies generally show associations between arts participation and social benefits of this type, but they don't prove that the arts cause those outcomes.

Some people object to discussing the worth of the arts in these ways, believing that it draws attention away from the intrinsic worth of the art itself. However, we know that impact occurs at both the individual and the social levels (e.g., when a group of people talk about an arts program they just experienced). We believe the social settings in which many arts are experienced, the way the arts draw people together, and the way that works are often interpreted through conversation, are indeed central to many works of art.

Further study of social impact will not only benefit policymakers, but also arts organizations, who will gain a deeper understanding of how their public programs contribute to larger social impacts.

Evidence of this area of impact would be found in:

1. Studies of community impact

- *We hypothesize that communities benefit from arts organizations in ways that cannot be captured by simply summing up the responses that individual patrons have to arts experiences. Does this hypothesis stand up to empirical testing?*
- *To what extent do renowned artists, arts organizations and festivals increase awareness and produce reputational gains for communities, domestically and abroad?*
- *Does funding multiple arts organizations in a single community lead to redundancies or symbioses across organizations, or both? If so, how does this work and does it create a greater impact?*
- *How does the Canada Council's funding interact with support that is provided by other public and private funders at the community level? What roles do the various funders play in the local arts ecosystems?*

2. Studies of the social impacts of arts participation

- *In what ways does arts participation contribute to wellbeing?*
- *Do the arts contribute something to wellbeing that can't be achieved through other activities?*

3. Studies built on asset-based outcome rubrics (e.g., "cultural capital" or "creative capabilities")

- *Are creative capabilities evenly distributed across the diverse communities of Canada?*
- *How are creative capabilities best discussed in Indigenous contexts?*
- *How are cultural capabilities developed and maintained?*

'Creative capabilities' is an example of an asset-based outcome framework that considers culture and creativity as a public good. Researchers measure the extent to which individuals and communities have the freedom to create or appreciate whatever culture empowers them.

Social benefits can arise locally, nationally, and even internationally, as seen in international relationships that are forged and supported through cultural diplomacy. The Canada Council makes significant investments in a number of international initiatives, which undoubtedly impact how we see ourselves, how we are seen by others, and how we relate to the rest of the world. The social impacts of the Canada Council's international work are likely considerable, but we have not yet incorporated these impacts into the Framework.

Introduction

The task

In late 2017, the Canada Council for the Arts contracted WolfBrown, through a Request For Proposals process, to propose a framework for measuring the intrinsic impacts generated by the Council's funding.

The Council commissioned this work not only to improve its understanding of the impacts it makes, but also to improve its ability to demonstrate the many ways in which Canadians are enriched by the arts. In part, the Council is motivated to measure the impact of its funding because of a heightened sense of accountability for the Parliamentary increase in its annual appropriation between 2016 and 2021, but also to demonstrate the value of investing in the arts.

As a starting point, the Canada Council expressed interest in exploring three types of impact:

1. the intrinsic impacts of a single experience;
2. the cumulative intrinsic impacts or the 'value footprint' of an institution on its community;
3. the intrinsic impacts of the arts on an entire community.

Together with our associates at the Canada Council, WolfBrown has been on a two-year journey of learning, articulating, refining, testing and ultimately crystalizing what the Council thinks about the impacts it generates and how it can realistically measure them.

Rather than adopting a pre-designed measurement framework, we chose instead to examine a wide range of impact measurement approaches and design something unique and idiosyncratic to the Canada Council. The resulting Impact Framework provides the Canada Council with a holistic and multidimensional picture of its impact on artists, arts organizations, audiences, the general public, and the cultural milieu in Canada and beyond. Far from being a prescriptive check-list, the notion of self-determination has been a guiding principle in the development of this work, so that artists and arts organizations in the sector are able to identify and explore aspects of impact that are relevant to their work.

We designed the Framework to achieve multiple goals:

- Provide the Council with a blueprint for gathering evidence of the intrinsic impact of its investments in artists and organizations;
- Support artists and organizations in understanding and articulating the intrinsic impact of *their* work;
- Support critical self-reflection and inform the Council's future strategic decision-making with relevant data;
- Forge partnerships to deepen the sector's understanding of the intrinsic impact of the arts in the short term and long term.

Our methodology

To ground the Framework in the most current thinking, we began our process with a number of literature reviews exploring other frameworks, research methodologies and understandings of impact in the arts and several adjacent fields. Drawing on those research insights, we developed theoretical concepts of intrinsic impact and worked with Council staff to ensure that these were appropriate for the specific institutional and cultural contexts in which they operate. An initial draft of the Framework was then discussed with an Advisory Committee consisting of thought leaders from other government agencies, Indigenous groups, academia, and arts service organizations. Their contributions have informed our work throughout.

In an iterative process, we held three rounds of consultations with various stakeholders of the Canadian arts sector to test the logic and usefulness of the Framework, and to identify the potential for it to be applied in the field. The first round of consultations elicited feedback from various governmental and private arts funders. The second sought the perspective of national arts service organizations and other ‘arts alliances’ with a stake in research. In the third round of consultations, we met with representatives of thirty arts organizations in Vancouver, Quebec City and Halifax. Each wave of consultations resulted in a summary report and revisions to the Framework.

The final phase of work has been to identify measurement approaches and develop strategies for rolling out research initiatives that will substantiate the proposed impact theory with tangible evidence. Concrete steps that the Canada Council can take towards implementing this research are presented in a separate Implementation Plan .

Terminology and important theoretical concepts

Given the many abstract concepts and technical language used in the Framework, it is helpful to establish a core set of definitions and key theoretical concepts.

‘Impact’ – the word “impact” is often used to describe the effects of a program on individual participants. But we use “impact” in a larger sense. We mean impact as experienced by artists and organizations that receive Canada Council funding (e.g. the ways that funding shapes the careers of artists or catalyzes an organization), as well as the impact that individuals experience, both in the short term and cumulatively over their lifetimes.

‘Upstream impacts’ – impacts most directly related to the Council’s funding (e.g. the immediate benefits to funded artists and organizations).

‘Downstream impacts’ – impacts that result from the work of funded artists and organizations and that may be attributed to numerous causes, including but not limited to the Council’s funding (e.g. impacts on audiences and communities).

‘Qualitative’ research analyses data that is not numerical. It can be used to capture someone’s experience at an arts program, often in his or her own words. Qualitative data helps to tell a deeper story than statistics alone would allow. It gets at questions of “how” and “why”.

‘Intrinsic’ refers to the inherent and idiosyncratic impacts of arts activities arising directly from the aesthetic experience. Intrinsic benefits can be immediate or long-term.

‘Instrumental’ in this context refers to the way in which something contributes to other, non-intrinsic outcomes – usually economic or social. The cultural sector often makes claims about the instrumental impact it has (e.g. improving test scores, reducing crime or enhancing community development).

Our thinking about impact is guided by a key theoretical distinction between two types of artistic programming:

‘Impact-driven artistic work’ – artistic works that are created out of an artistic impulse or curated for their inherent worth, but without a specific outcome in mind. Despite the lack of pre-defined outcomes they have *impacts* of various sorts (i.e., they affect people and sometimes entire communities in various ways). The “outcomes” of these programs, therefore, are their intrinsic impacts. Evaluation principles don’t apply here because there is no logic model behind an artistic vision. Rather, accountability can be assessed through impact measurement.

‘Outcome-driven artistic work’ – artistic practices and programs that are designed with a specific outcome in mind, as is the case with many education and community engagement programs. These programs are sometimes grounded in a program theory or logic model, and can be evaluated against desired outcomes for accountability purposes.

We accept that a good deal of artistic work lies in between these two ends of the spectrum. In fact, many arts organizations offer both types of programs. Nonetheless, the Impact Framework is primarily concerned with impact-driven artistic work.

A note about context

Across many developed economies, there is a drive to measure the impact generated by the arts. Governments wish to measure the impacts of their investments, funders seek to spend finite

“There is an ever-increasing emphasis - as there is in all policy sectors - on clearly, rigorously, and persuasively stating the rationale for government support for the arts. Moreover, politicians, senior bureaucrats and the general public look increasingly to impact and outcomes. [...] What impact do grants have, not only for artists and arts organizations, but for society at large? In this context the Canada Council cannot afford to see artists and arts organizations as the main “clientele” that it “serves” [...] The ultimate “client”, as it were, is the Canadian public. Stated bluntly, the Canada Council must have a persuasive answer to the question, “What have you done for Canadian society lately?”

- Monica Gattinger. *The Roots of Culture, the Power of Art: The First Sixty Years of the Canada Council for the Arts*. 2017. p9.

resources in the most appropriate ways, and artists and cultural organizations want to understand and maximize the impact of their work on communities.

The desire to measure the impact of the arts is relatively recent, and driven by political forces that want to hold public arts funders accountable as they would in any other area of public policy. This trend has been greeted with many critical voices. Two kinds of objections are used: one is that public funding for the arts is intrinsically good and does not need justification; the other is that there is no appropriate way to measure the impact of the arts.

While the Framework does not specify research methodologies (though recommendations are made in a forthcoming Implementation Plan) it addresses the second objection by breaking the large and

amorphous idea of impact into more readily observed – and studied – types of impact. The critics tend to say that impact measurement is reductive and inappropriate but, for the most part, they object to approaches that use *quantitative* measures of the *instrumental* impacts of the arts. When this project began, the Canada Council clearly said it was looking for a framework to shed light on the *intrinsic* impacts of the arts, drawing on *qualitative* evidence. That is what we set out to deliver.

Why Canada needs a unique impact framework

Canada's government and society are in many ways distinct from other societies. This reality and the associated complexities have made it essential for WolfBrown to create a unique impact framework for the Canada Council. Here are the major issues that led us to this conclusion:

- Many countries are driven by their cultural policies to protect and preserve a specific national cultural identity. But Canada's diverse, multicultural demographic and history calls for an inclusive approach to cultural policy that supports and celebrates many cultural identities. Meanwhile, Canada has a strong desire to support cultural diversity in the face of the monopolizing forces of global consumer culture.
- With the ascendance of Indigenous arts, and following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Indigenous artists and organizations are getting more funding, recognition and support from the Canada Council than ever before. This reflects the Council's desire to contribute in a demonstrable way to a process of healing and reconciliation. With Indigenous leadership and facilitation, the framework has the potential to explore, meaningfully and respectfully, understandings of impact in the context of Indigenous cosmologies, epistemologies and value systems.
- Canada's provincial and territorial tapestry makes this work distinct from other international contexts. Depending on regions or municipalities, the arts are expected to play various roles – ranging from expressing humanist values to providing social glue or driving economic growth. Cultural policies and funding strategies are different from region to region and, politically and philosophically, the value of the arts and culture in each community has its own distinct particularities.
Indeed, the intersection of Canada's multiple cultural identities creates a situation of some complexity. This is further complicated by the combination of Canada's low population density and disparate lifestyles and perspectives – from the prairies of rural Manitoba to the inner-city high-rises of Toronto, to the North – and all types of places in between.
- Administratively, there is a clear division of responsibility at a federal level between the Department of Canadian Heritage, which sets cultural policy ensuring Canadians have access to culture, heritage and sport¹; and the Canada Council, which aims to foster and promote the study and enjoyment of the arts, mainly by supporting the creation, production and distribution of art. Many of the artists and organizations that receive grants from the Canada Council also receive grants from their provincial and territorial arts funders, and from municipal governments. Each funder operates independently, with local priorities and long-standing relationships with arts organizations in their region.

¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/corporate/mandate.html>

Some methodological challenges

The work of developing an intrinsic impact framework for the Canada Council is fraught with serious and profound research challenges. This is partly because the cultures, communities and political contexts the Council serves are distinct and complex. But it is also because measuring the impact of the arts is inherently difficult. Here is why:

- Impacts are diffuse – a painting or theatre production may affect its audience only if they are paying close attention and are not distracted.
- Impact accumulates through a more or less random series of experiences, which is different for every person (i.e. it is difficult to control for “dosage”).
- Impacts are hard to attribute – for example, many people and factors contribute to the impact of a live theatre performance.
- Impacts are impermanent – the impact of an arts experience wanes over time and may be enhanced or displaced by subsequent arts experiences.
- There are enormous cost and methodological barriers to measuring cumulative impacts (i.e. the impact of a lifetime of arts experiences).
- Impacts are not always pleasant – many artistic works are intended to shock or discomfort – and their social consequences are not always positive (i.e. some works reinforce negative stereotypes or marginalize communities).
- Impacts are both subjective and objective – who is qualified to say whether an impact has occurred or not and what threshold of proof is required to make such claims?
- While sophisticated tools are available for collecting and analyzing qualitative data, the value of the analysis often hinges on the ability to create coding schemes that reveal important information about people’s experiences of organizations or events.

Other impact frameworks

The Canada Council is not the only organization working to understand the impact of the arts. Much scholarship and a well-networked community of researchers have made insights that the Canada Council can use as it works toward devising and using a new impact framework.

To ensure that our framework would draw from all available insights, we conducted extensive research on the theory and practice of impact measurement from nine distinct perspectives at the outset of our work. Here is a snapshot of our findings:

- Several other **federal agencies have developed cultural indicator frameworks** that draw on existing data sets (e.g. economic data, general social surveys); while that data is useful, the frameworks don’t appear to be used on a regular basis. Some frameworks reference intrinsic impacts but do not specify indicators, saying that this area of research is emergent. Most recently, a popular impact framework has emerged in Australia, which aims to provide a research tool for evaluating all kinds of arts programs and projects. However, it focuses on measuring the impact of specific events and does not consider extended impact. Other informal networks are currently discussing intrinsic impact, but none have advanced a framework or model for assessment.

- The Canada Council contributes significantly to the body of creative output representing many cultures and aesthetic forms. A comprehensive impact framework should account for the value of the art itself – in other words, **contributions to the worldwide body of artistic works** by Canadian artists. This is especially important if the Canada Council wishes to preserve and grow the body of artistic works reflecting the values and heritage of distinct cultures within Canadian society.
- In the **Quebec political context**, cultural policy often places a strong value on the democratization of culture, notably through “**médiation culturelle**”. It **positions culture as a right**, as opposed to something that is there to generate economic or other social outcomes. Simultaneously, francophone thinking embraces the idea of cultural citizenship as a societal asset (“**citoyenneté culturelle**”). Art is conceived as a form of cultural and civic engagement.
- Arts and culture can affect individuals in ways – such as increasing trust and social cohesion – that directly influence **how they relate to the larger community**. Opportunities to participate in ritualized gatherings, to express one’s heritage and to associate with artists and organizations leads to a sense of belonging and pride of place.
- **Social network analysis** might be a tool for assessing organizations’ relevance and embeddedness in a community. There’s a flow of resources within a network and what is exchanged is more important than the presence of a connection.
- Well-developed research approaches exist for **measuring social cohesion**, aspects of which include bridging and bonding, trust and pro-social behaviors. We know arts attendance is correlated with social cohesion, but many other types of activities (e.g. sports) also lead to social cohesion outcomes.
- Many studies claim to identify the **characteristics, attributes and values of “relevant and responsive” arts organizations** (although few examples exist of how this is measured and benchmarked). An institutional commitment to participant feedback and evaluation is frequently cited as one such characteristic. Relevance and responsiveness are preconditions to generating powerful intrinsic impacts. The Canada Council is an agent that engenders this within organizations, amplifying their reach and resources. Qualities of relevance and responsiveness may be revealed in an organization’s capacity, competence, values and motivations.
- **Diversity and inclusion** are not the same thing, and are defined differently in different countries and regions. Canada is an especially complex country, with language minorities, Indigenous peoples, immigrants, ethnic or racialized minorities, Deaf and disabled people, and other equity-seeking groups. Most approaches to diversity have looked at measuring the demographic characteristics of audiences and workforces in the arts, but ignore the important work that arts groups do in engaging audiences in artistic work that expands their consciousness about diversity and inclusion. There’s an emerging practice that draws on qualitative assessments

Médiation culturelle aims at creating links between the arts and culture sector and various social groups through a large array of strategies that enhance access to a diversity of cultural practices and encourage the active participation of all citizens in the arts. It is about bringing more people into the cultural sector and increasing the number and diversity of people it serves.

Citoyenneté culturelle is based on a bottom-up conception of culture that starts with individual practices and influences cultural institutions. It embraces the idea that citizens should be in a position to actively participate in the creation, production and dissemination of the arts, so that all citizens, especially those who are traditionally marginalized, can contribute to the definition of the culture of our time. In other words, it seeks to pursue self-determination and self-expression.

of organizations' commitment to diversity and inclusion and their ability to bridge cultural barriers, rather than narrowly focusing on the demographics of participants.

- **Sophisticated portfolio management systems** enable funders to optimize expected returns and balance portfolios according to predetermined criteria. “Case study libraries” provide the most basic form of transparency about funded organizations and projects, and their impacts. By looking at an entire portfolio of grants, one can discern how particular categories of investment create value.

Telling the story of the Canada Council's impact

The Canada Council for the Arts works to ensure and enrich a vibrant artistic life by investing in professional arts organizations and artists who bring meaning and enjoyment to Canadians.

While the [Canada Council's mandate](#) implies some level of social engagement (“...promotes the study and enjoyment of the arts”), in general the Council doesn't make funding decisions based on specific objectives for social impact. Rather, it invests broadly in a large, diverse and complex ecosystem. Its arm's-length relationship with the Canadian government gives the Council a good deal of independence in setting policies and programs that contribute to a healthy arts ecosystem. Investments are guided by a set of priorities, values and beliefs about where its resources will most benefit the sector.

The Canada Council makes its investments through two primary mechanisms: a suite of six programs launched in 2017, each with a detailed logic model (the “[New Funding Model](#)”); and a set of commitments outlined in the current [Strategic Plan](#). It is important to distinguish these delivery mechanisms from the [funding targets](#) that the Canada Council has set to guide how it funnels its increased resources (from a five-year parliamentary appropriation) into existing programs and strategic commitments.

As we framed the Canada Council's impact, we did so based on the belief that the ability to lead an expressive life is a basic human right, consistent with UNESCO's Statement on Cultural Rights as Human Rights, and that a diverse and thriving cultural life is essential to a democratic society, as declared by the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

From the beginning, the mandate of the Canada Council has promoted the study and enjoyment of the arts. The Council does this by ensuring that Canadians have access to a wide range of meaningful arts programs, including those that are not solely driven by marketplace demand.

“Cultural activities, goods and services have both an economic and a cultural nature, because they convey identities, values and meanings, and must therefore not be treated as solely having commercial value.” (UNESCO, 2005)

Building on these basic assumptions, the Impact Framework tells the story of how the Canada Council's investments of public funds benefit the

Canadian public. The Canada Council specifically aims to focus on non-economic or *intrinsic* impacts, acknowledging that the primary benefits of a vibrant arts sector are not economic.

Our proposed Impact Framework will help the Canada Council organize and focus its efforts to collect evidence of impact, evaluate its programs, and reflect critically on its approaches to funding. In addressing this considerable challenge, the Canada Council must enter into a dialogue with its many stakeholders about the very nature of impact, how impact can be *reasonably* and *plausibly* measured, and how the resulting information can help set policy.



The Canada Council’s impact is best understood by its contributions to a diverse and resilient arts ecosystem

Like a forest, Canada’s arts ecosystem is naturally occurring, vulnerable to disruption and constantly adapting to available resources. Balance is a key characteristic of ecosystems. Species exchange whatever resources are available, and adapt or die when resources are scarce. When resources are scarce for a long time, biodiversity decreases. If the Canada Council’s funding were reduced, Canada’s arts ecosystem would survive but many trees would bear less fruit, and some would perish.

The resources that nourish the arts ecosystem are both tangible and intangible, and both monetary and non-monetary, including talent, creativity, cultural traditions and stewardship – as well as facilities and, of course, money.

The Canada Council’s funding reaches a large portion of Canada’s complex and diverse arts ecosystem – thousands of artists and organizations each year. This makes the Council a major stakeholder in the health and vitality of the ecosystem.

In taking stock of its impact, the Canada Council must be clear about which impacts are a direct or indirect consequence of its funding. In a forest, for example, someone who fertilizes the ground can take credit for the nutrient-rich soil, but should be careful about claiming responsibility for the fruits of the forest since many other factors contribute to that outcome.

Similarly, the Canada Council does not claim to “own” the impacts generated by its grantees’ programs, and is not prescriptive in their artistic decisions.²

² The Canada Council does not commission works of art. It does not curate, program, or undertake audience development initiatives. Instead, it uses its funding and influence to enable artists and arts organizations to generate and share work and have an impact on the lives of Canadians.

Many other funders share credit for grantees' successes, making it difficult to trace the path of a "Canada Council dollar" through an organization receiving core funding – although the path is clearer for project funding. For core funding, the Council invests at the enterprise level and trusts that its support will catalyze impacts as a result.

The Impact Framework recognizes this *continuum of attribution*, referring to two types of impacts:

1. **upstream impacts**, which are most directly related to the Council's funding (such as the immediate benefits to funded artists and organizations)
2. **downstream impacts**, which result from many factors, including the Council's funding (such as the impact on audiences for its grantees' programs and exhibitions)

When we look only at downstream impacts (e.g. examining the fruit of a few select trees), we miss the larger picture of a healthy ecosystem. Similarly, when we examine only the upstream impacts – the richness of the soil, or the biodiversity of the forest – we risk losing sight of the power of the arts to provoke, move and inspire people in tangible ways. This is the challenge inherent in our framework.

Canadians benefit from a diverse and resilient arts ecosystem that yields a wide range of public programs, year after year. The Canada Council's impact, therefore, is best described in terms of the varied ways in which it supports a healthy arts ecosystem through its grant programs and strategic initiatives.

This, then, is the organizing principle of the Impact Framework: the Canada Council will describe its impact, and gather evidence, in **five areas of upstream and downstream impact**.

Building the Council's strategic commitments into the impact framework

A core component of the Canada Council's impact stems from its capacity to define and implement strategic priorities that respond to challenges and opportunities beyond specific grant programs. The Council's arm's-length relationship with the Canadian government gives it the freedom it needs to respond creatively to a wide range of policy issues and make strategic commitments that fulfill its mandate.

Some of the Council's current strategic initiatives align with specific federal priorities, while others spring from the Council's own objectives. Some commitments are value-based, ongoing commitments; others are targeted and timely; and still others are a hybrid of ongoing and timely.

The Council's current set of strategic initiatives addresses a range of priorities, including:

- a sustained commitment to supporting Indigenous artists and organizations
- supporting both official languages
- investing in youth
- raising artists' profiles internationally
- ensuring equitable access to funding

The scope and duration of these initiatives vary substantially. Some reflect specific objectives embedded in the Council's strategic plan. Others may arise from the Council's desire to respond to current events or changing conditions, and thus will change over time to reflect institutional priorities of the Council and wider social concerns in Canada as a whole.

Further, there are new initiatives such as:

- supporting the digital transformation of Canada's arts sector
- increasing the proportion of new parliamentary funding going to first-time grant recipients – with emphasis on organizations targeted by the Canada Council's equity measures
- achieving equal distribution of support between project and core funding³

These commitments will cut across the five impact areas in the proposed Impact Framework, yet the targeted focus of some of these investments suggests that they also be assessed in ways that take the specific objectives and contexts into account, such as program evaluation.

Indigenous Arts and Indigenous perspectives on impact

The Canada Council has strongly stated its support for self-determination and sovereignty. As part of this, the Council wants to respectfully engage in research with the Indigenous arts community that helps further understand the significance of Canada Council's funding for Indigenous artists and the role(s) that Indigenous arts and culture play in the lives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians.

The Council recognizes that research methodologies are rooted in European epistemologies, and that the meaning and attribution of "impact," and the role of government agencies in research with Indigenous peoples and activities require careful consideration. We have therefore taken no definitive stand on how the Framework might be utilized in an Indigenous context. Rather, as the Framework has been developed and revised, a series of conversations with the Advisory Committee (which includes an Indigenous member), public arts funders and other stakeholders, and the Director of *Creating, Knowing and Sharing: The Arts and Culture of First Nations, Inuit and Metis Peoples* have helped to identify some of the issues that need to be addressed. It is clear that much of the terminology and concepts underpinning the work are based in a colonial model; even the notions of "the arts" and "artists" carry different meanings.

To be mindful of **Indigenous understandings of impact** the Framework must be able to integrate impacts of Indigenous practices and also recognize that there are practices and understandings that will inevitably exist beyond and outside of it. It should be understood that reconciliation and restitution sit apart from audience impact, and there are important considerations concerning for whom Indigenous works are created.

This section seeks to crystallize thinking on what a multifaceted and respectful approach to this engagement could be and to provide a basis for discussion on future actions.

³ Increased support to new applicants and equal distribution between project and core funding both have a target date of 2021. Project funding includes grants to individuals, groups and organizations.

Self-determined approach

The first and most critical piece is to begin a dialogue between the Canada Council and Indigenous researchers about what studies already exist that look at the role of arts and culture in Indigenous communities and the roles of artists and arts organizations in that context. It is important to learn more about the interests and methodologies that Indigenous researchers are working with and how the Council could support these. This could include sharing the Council's work on the impact framework, the evaluation of the Council's earlier Aboriginal Arts Programs, and the Aboriginal Research Initiative to contextualize the Council's past and present approaches. The dialogue could result in an Indigenous-led stream of research parallel to the work within the impact framework or it could lead towards different types of partnerships or initiatives. If individual Indigenous artists, researchers, and communities are interested in exploring these issues along with Canada Council, the Council will explore opportunities to collaborate.

Open participation

As with all of the Council's activities and programs, Indigenous artists and organizations can decide to participate in research through the current impact framework or may engage with research which is designed and led by Indigenous researchers in a self-determined and culturally sovereign approach. Research projects that are based on the impact framework will be inclusive and voluntary, and the methodologies would be designed to respect an array of cultural differences and contexts. The Framework is flexible and responsive to a wide variety of approaches and would be enriched by multiple perspectives.

Impact of Indigenous art on non-Indigenous Canadians

The arts are seen as a powerful path towards greater understanding of the impact of cultural genocide, and the Council's role in fostering that has been identified in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action #83:

We call upon the Canada Council for the Arts to establish, as a funding priority, a strategy for Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists to undertake collaborative projects and produce works that contribute to the reconciliation process.

As an important aspect of the Council's dedication to reconciliation, two specific streams of work could further a focus on the impact of Indigenous (and collaborative) work on non-Indigenous Canadians.

To start, recognizing that the Council encourages non-Indigenous arts organizations to consider how to respectfully work with Indigenous arts and artists through their programming and other activities, there is significant opportunity to examine the impact of that on the organizations and on artists and cultural workers themselves. If we believe that the arts can contribute to reconciliation, we need to understand how the arts sector itself can become more conscious of these issues in order to meaningfully and appropriately engage with Indigenous artists of various backgrounds and cultural identities.

A secondary focus could explore how the arts support greater public awareness of reconciliation and the changes in perspectives and behavior that result. Indigenous art work is a vital vehicle for telling the story of the impact of residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, treaty negotiations, and other systemic issues that affect Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples and nations. While many Indigenous artists make work that explores the impact of these histories, some artists commit

explicitly to dialogue and education through their work. The Council could explore the benefits of this in the broader process of reconciliation.

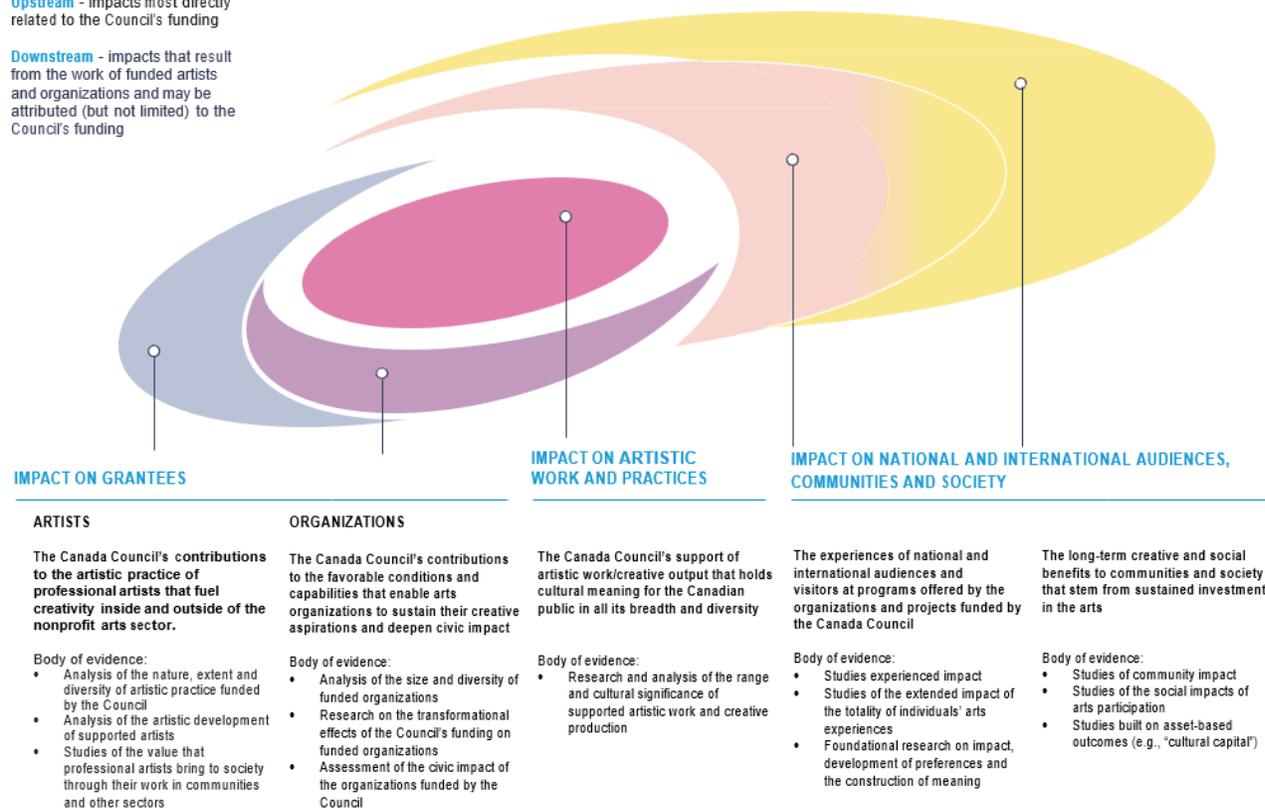
Overview of the Impact Areas

The framework recognizes different types of impacts by distinguishing them between upstream and downstream impacts in five areas.

The Canada Council for the Arts commissioned WolfBrown team - Alan Brown, John Carnwath and James Doerer, to create a custom-made framework to suit the complexity of the Canadian arts ecology.

Upstream - impacts most directly related to the Council's funding

Downstream - impacts that result from the work of funded artists and organizations and may be attributed (but not limited) to the Council's funding



The Qualitative Impact Framework is organized around five areas of upstream and downstream impact, each describing a particular way in which the Canada Council's work positively impacts the arts ecosystem. While some of the areas might seem to correspond to individual funding programs or strategic priorities, this was not intentional. They are intended as broad abstractions of impact that might stem from any or all of the Council's current funding programs or strategic investment funds, and could change over time as priorities shift.

Impact on Grantees

1. The Canada Council's contributions to the artistic practices of professional artists that fuel creativity inside and outside of the nonprofit arts sector.
2. The Canada Council's contributions to the favorable conditions and capabilities that enable organizations to sustain their creative potential and deepen their civic impact.

Impact on Artistic Work and Practices

3. The Canada Council's support of original artistic work/creative output that holds cultural meaning to the Canadian public in all of its breadth and diversity.

Impact on Audiences, Communities and Society

4. The experiences of national and international audiences and visitors at programs offered by the Canada Council-funded organizations and projects.
5. The long-term creative and social benefits to communities and society that stem from sustained investment in the arts.

Note:

Throughout the process of vetting the Framework with stakeholders, we became increasingly aware that the structure of the Framework doesn't capture some of the second-order or "spillover" impacts of Council funding. For example, we expect that the impact of Council funding on artists would also have an impact on other artists (funded or non-funded). Similarly, the impact of Council funding on artists would also have an impact on organizations, and *vice versa*. The impact of Council funding on organizations would also have an impact on other organizations, and so forth. As the Framework is implemented, we hope to learn more about these symbiotic aspects of Council funding.

A Framework for Qualitative Impact Measurement

The following overview describes each of the five impact areas and suggests sources of data that would substantiate each area.



Impact Area 1: The Canada Council's contributions to the artistic practices of professional artists that fuel creativity inside and outside of the nonprofit arts sector

Artists are a keystone species in the arts ecosystem, meaning other species in the ecosystem depend on them. If artists were diminished as a species, the ecosystem would change drastically. When they thrive as a species, the ecosystem flourishes.

Since its founding, the Canada Council has supported the work of thousands of professional artists. In 2018–2019 alone, more than 2,880 artists received funding for a vast array of projects. Like the Council's funding of organizations, the funding of creative projects is an upstream source of impact.

The Canada Council, through its criteria and peer assessment processes, selects the artistic activity it funds, and the public benefits from the richness and diversity of those artists' work. The Council also recognizes that it is still addressing historical barriers for some groups of artists (e.g. Indigenous, culturally diverse, Deaf and disabled, and official-language minority communities), to achieve their full creative potential.

While funded artists benefit financially in the short term from the funding of their projects, the impact of their creative activity might play out over many years, or even a lifetime, and might take different forms. Artistic ideas that spin out of funded work might evolve and bear fruit well beyond the grant period. Likewise, these projects impact other artists and organizations, and investment in this funded work might pay dividends well into the future.

Evidence of this area of impact would be found in:

1. The nature, extent and diversity of artistic practice supported by the Council

The Canadian public benefits from having access to a diverse range of artistic practices and cultural traditions. As a stakeholder in Canada's arts ecosystem, therefore, the Canada Council's impact is reflected in the nature, extent and diversity of artistic practice that it supports. Of course, the landscape of artistic practice is vast, and all of the Council's grants affect artistic practice in some way. Despite this complexity, the Council sees value in understanding more about the impact its funding has on specific areas of artistic practice that the Council has prioritized, or might prioritize in the future. Several research questions are included here, but more may be added in the future.

- *How does Council funding ensure the vitality of artistic practice across the many cultures and artistic disciplines of interest to the Canadian public?*
- *How does Council funding allow for continuous experimentation and innovation in artistic practice and cultural production?*

- *What is the impact of equitable access to the arts for official language minority communities, Indigenous peoples, immigrants, ethnic or racialized minorities, Deaf and disabled people, and other equity-seeking groups?*

2. **An analysis of the artistic development of supported artists**

Over the years, the Canada Council has collected evidence of the impact of its grants on artists' creative activity, although most of this research has been limited to snapshots based on one-time surveys and interviews. More can be done to track the impact of Canada Council funding on artists' projects over a longer period of time, which in turn, will paint a fuller picture of impact in this area.

- *What is the impact of different types of project support (e.g., grants for the creation and production of new work, residencies, touring support, etc.)?*
- *How does the Council's investment in artists' projects inspire and inform the arts sector?*
- *Do organizations draw on the pool of artistic creation developed through the Council's support to individual artists?*
- *What is the larger ecosystem of support for these projects, including support provided by Council-funded organizations?*

3. **The value that professional artists bring to society through their work in communities and other sectors**

There has been extensive research on the ease with which professional artists move back and forth between the nonprofit arts sector, the cultural industries and other sectors of the economy. When they pursue paid or unpaid work outside the arts, artists reach into the larger economy and bring their skills and assets to bear on a wider set of economic and social outcomes. Much has been written about the extent to which businesses in the creative industries depend on the creativity and imagination of artists, but less is known about how artists contribute to other sectors. As a major supporter of artists at all stages of their careers, the Canada Council has an interest in gathering evidence that the work of its funded artists positively impacts the economic and social vitality of Canada's diverse communities.

- *To what extent are artists able to bring their artistic sensibility, skills and resources to bear in work in their communities?*
- *What benefits do artists bring to other sectors including creative industries? What do employers and leaders in other sectors value about working with artists?*



Impact Area 2: The Canada Council’s contributions to the favorable conditions and capabilities that enable arts organizations to sustain their creative aspirations and deepen their civic impact

A large percentage of the Canada Council’s grants are awarded to arts and other organizations that produce or present artistic programs and events. Such grants include multi-year core support or support for individual projects. The organizations that receive core funding from the Council represent an extraordinary diversity of aesthetic forms and reach far and wide across Canada.

In developing application guidelines, the Canada Council sets out the organizational qualities it believes will lead to successful service to the public – mostly an organization’s emphasis on artistic programming, but also associated activities such as outreach and sector development. The Council prioritizes organizations that work to embody these qualities. This is at the heart of the Council’s peer assessment process.

The Canada Council uses formal criteria and peer assessment when selecting organizations for core funding. Then, once they are funded, organizations are left to do what they are funded to do. The Council does not direct aesthetic decisions or dictate which audiences the funded organizations should choose to target.

This is an upstream source of impact. In funding many hundreds of organizations, the Canada Council aims to create the favorable conditions for funded organizations to flourish and the arts sector as a whole to reflect a full spectrum or “biodiversity” of artistic expression.

Evidence of this area of impact would be found in:

1. The size and diversity of the group of funded organizations

If the portfolio of funded organizations itself represents a source of impact, then descriptive information about it should be widely accessible so that Canadians can better understand these organizations and why they are worthy of public support. The Canada Council does this to some extent with its “Stats and Stories” webpage; however, there is significant potential to mine and highlight these impacts and share them more globally.

- *What story does the portfolio of funded organizations tell of Canada’s cultural output?*
- *How does the Council’s funding distribution across different dimensions (e.g., art forms, geographies, organizational size and type) nurture the ecosystem as a whole?*
- *What does the pattern of investment across the Council’s multiple objectives (e.g., artistic exploration, sector development, preservation of traditional art forms/customary practices) tell us?*

2. The effects of the Council’s funding on supported organizations

The Council is aware that its funding has many direct and indirect impacts on organizations. But more can be done to understand and illustrate how the Council’s investments are catalytic at the organizational level with respect to leadership, financial sustainability, community service, artistry, etc.

- *What are the tangible effects of the Canada Council's funding on organizations in terms of their programming, operations and overall vision?*
- *What is the significance of the Council's multi-year support for funded organizations above and beyond the grant amount? How is this manifested (e.g., through tangible results such as programming, public outreach and work conditions, or more intangible benefits such as long-term planning, leveraging of other funds and ability to collaborate)?*
- *In what ways, if any, do organizations evolve or adapt in response to funding criteria from the Canada Council?*

3. **The civic impact of supported organizations**

Evidence of this area of impact will include assessments of the qualitative “civic impact” of funded organizations on their communities. In making funding decisions, the Council considers the totality of an organization’s relationship with its community, not specific community or outcome-driven programming. Many other factors besides Canada Council funding will influence an organization’s footprint in its community. Regardless, the Canada Council understands that its funding often plays a role in allowing organizations to deepen community ties, and seeks evidence of this impact.

Organizations that have access to tools for assessing their civic impact are enabled to learn about their value in the eyes of community stakeholders. In turn, this diagnostic work of deep listening may better position them to respond to the needs of their communities.

- *What are the structural, cultural and programmatic building blocks of civic impact? How is “civic impact” understood differently in different contexts (e.g., rural, urban, regional)?*
- *Do organizations use Canada Council funding to operationalize a commitment to civic impact? If so, how?*
- *How can the Council lead this conversation to deepen awareness and capacity around notions of community or citizenship with funded organizations?*
- *How do organizations’ beliefs about their civic contributions compare with the value that their communities see in them?*



Impact Area 3: The Canada Council’s support of artistic work/creative output that holds cultural meaning to the Canadian public in all its breadth and diversity

Each year, artists and organizations funded by the Canada Council create a large body of artistic work. This work takes many forms, including film, art exhibits, installations, new choreographies, compositions, new literary works, new adaptations of classics, customary practices, directorial interpretations, digital art and a wide array of other aesthetic expressions.

While the Canada Council itself does not commission this work, its funding plays a role in creating the conditions for the work to be commissioned and created. Thus, the Canada Council has a reasonable interest in the body of evidence represented in the artistic work that its funded artists and organizations create. The intrinsic impact of this work is reflected in its enduring meaning and resonance with the Canadian public, and in the ways the work influences future artistic work.

In fact, Canada Council funding has supported numerous artistic works that are now seen as highly influential.

This source of impact lies across a spectrum of the attribution continuum. In some cases, the work can be easily traced back to Canada Council funding, while in other cases the relationship is very indirect.

Evidence of this area of impact would be found in:

1. **The range and cultural significance of supported artistic work/creative output**

The Canada Council should accumulate a range of examples (e.g. case studies) of artistic works created by or through its funded artists and organizations, describing the works in terms of their influence and cultural significance. In calling out the public benefit of specific works of art, there is a risk in over-emphasizing highly popular works. Works that are significant for other reasons – especially those that reflect distinct and plural cultural contexts – must also be highlighted. For example, there is special and unique value for Indigenous communities in the works by Indigenous artists that carry significant cultural meaning.

- *To what extent do the funded works, including prizes, represent and engage the Canadian public in all of its breadth and diversity?*
- *To what extent do Canada Council-funded works represent cultural touch points or create lasting impacts on cultural awareness, and inform collective memories of distinct communities in Canada?*
- *How do different contexts – cultural, generational – bring specificity of meaning across this body of work?*
- *How can this work broker meaningful conversations between different cultural understandings?*
- *How do investments in circulation, touring and distributing original work influence the evolution of the work itself and its cultural significance?*



Impact Area 4: The experiences of national and international audiences and visitors at programs offered by the Canada Council-funded organizations and projects

This is a more downstream area of impact. Many factors beyond Canada Council funding contribute to the number and quality of public presentations an organization is able to offer, and many situational and contextual factors influence how audience members receive the work. However direct or indirect the link, the Canada Council fulfills its responsibility when people enjoy and find meaning in the programs of its grantees.

The Canada Council is not alone in its quest to understand how the public benefits intrinsically from the artistic work of artists and arts organizations. Assessing the impact of arts experiences on individuals has been a major focus of research around the globe over the past 10 years. Regardless, researchers still grapple with the “black box” of impact – the many gaps in theory and research-

based understandings of how impact is created. We see three major areas of unresolved inquiry in the black box:

1. the interplay between art and people, and the influence of various factors and circumstances that mediate between them; how memory is created; how preference is acquired, etc.
2. how individuals make a larger narrative of personal and symbolic meaning from the arts experiences they have (i.e. how “dosage” affects impact)
3. how individual impacts aggregate to create social impacts such as wellbeing or creative capacity, and how to define or describe social impact in a way that recognizes the unique contributions of the arts

Three types of impact

When we discuss the impact of arts programs on individuals, it is helpful to distinguish between three types of impact:

- **concurrent impact**, which happens during the experience
- **experienced impact**, which shows up hours or days after the event
- **extended impact**, where the impacts of individual events accumulate over time as a result of many engagements

We consider concurrent impact to be a largely involuntary, immediate and visceral response, while experienced impact is shaped by various cognitive filters (contextual information about the artwork, comparisons to other works, conversations with fellow audience members, etc.). Extended impact is the “lifetime value” a person gets from a particular experience. It is difficult to predict, since some impactful experiences may be forgotten over time, and others may take on more significance by becoming touchstones that people use to position and interpret later cultural experiences.

Some recent research has been focused on measuring experienced impact, perhaps because it is easiest to measure, and because the causal link between the “treatment” (i.e. the artistic work) and the “effect” is relatively clear. Some audience members enjoy giving feedback on their experiences through surveys or interviews, and some organizations find this information useful. Researchers have developed theoretical frameworks for experienced impact, yet questions remain about what the public actually finds meaningful and worthwhile about arts participation. And there are conflicting feelings about the wisdom of objectifying something as personal as the impact of arts experiences and deconstructing it into component parts for measurement purposes.

But an exclusive focus on measuring experienced impact risks missing the primary value of arts participation, much like one would miss the point of the long-term benefits of exercise if one measured only the impact of individual workouts. In preparing this framework, we have come to believe that the larger challenge – and the greatest potential reward – lies in developing stronger theoretical frameworks and measurement approaches for understanding extended impact. These frameworks would articulate how individuals construct a larger narrative from their arts experiences, how this narrative contributes to their quality of life, and what role an agency like the Canada Council plays in supporting those experiences.

Understanding the concurrent, experienced, and extended impacts of arts participation will require ongoing commitments to research, an unprecedented level of international collaboration across

scholarly fields and between practitioners and researchers, a high degree of intellectual honesty, and financial resources that are beyond the capacity of any single agency or funder. Questions of aesthetics have been asked for millennia, and likely will not be answered any time soon. Nevertheless, the Canada Council believes its impact framework would be incomplete without a commitment in principle to finding better ways of measuring the full array of impacts.

Evidence of this area of impact would be found in:

1. Studies of concurrent impact

This is a relatively new frontier of research, drawing from a variety of methods including biometric studies and other studies from the psychology field. These measurement approaches aim to develop objective measures of impact through empirical research. Theoretically, at least, this evidence could sidestep some of the subjectivity problems associated with other self-reported measurement approaches. At best, concurrent impact should be considered exploratory and complementary to other measurement approaches.

- *How does the concurrent experience of artistic works shape our cognitive and emotional responses? How does it affect our real or perceived relationships with others in attendance?*
- *How do neurological and physiological responses to creative work (in creation as well as reception) differ from responses to other activities? Can we isolate what makes arts experiences different from other activities?*

2. Studies of experienced impact

Across the three types of impact research, efforts have focused on measuring experienced impact, in part because methods for surveying audiences and visitors after their experiences are reasonably well understood and cost efficient. Other arts agencies have focused on experienced impact to the exclusion of other types of impact. We see value in assisting organizations in studying the impact of their artistic programs, but not to the exclusion of other types of impact research. Along the long and winding road of the lifelong impact of arts participation, experienced impact is a series of short stops. We include it here primarily to create resources for organizations that wish to deepen their understanding of experienced impact.

- *How do different kinds of artistic programs create different kinds of impact? What patterns can be established?*
- *How is impact affected by situational factors, such as venue, access, or presentation format?*
- *How is impact shaped by the cultural context in which the work is experienced? Does the same work produce distinct impacts when shown in different regions and communities across Canada and internationally?*
- *How do audience engagement techniques influence experienced impact?*
- *How might organizations extend or prolong the impact of their programs?*
- *Does marketing language affect how audiences experience art?*
- *What conditions lead to “peak experiences?”*

Methodological Questions about Measuring Experienced Impact

- *Can participation in impact measurement efforts be done in a way that actually benefits audience members? Are there new technologies that will allow for data collection and also increase engagement?*
- *What are the situations in which artistic and administrative leaders draw on impact measurement as a resource? Is it primarily only for marketing or advocacy purposes?*

Unfortunately, there is currently no plausible way for the Canada Council to report on the millions of arts experiences Canadians have at programs presented by Council-funded organizations. Instead, the Council can report on what the existing body of international research concludes about impact, where it falls short, and what it is contributing to “shrinking the black box.”

3. Studies of the extended impact of the totality of individuals’ arts experiences

This research could address several goals: 1) understanding how arts experiences accumulate into arcs of aesthetic discovery and appreciation, and the role of heritage, language, geography and other factors in supporting, diverting or suppressing these arcs; and 2) building an understanding of what Canadians find meaningful and worthwhile about arts programs, using the totality of their arts experience as a reference point.

This research will produce highly personal narratives about the impact of a diverse arts ecosystem. Such research could not be generalized to a broader population but could provide insights into how meaning is created. Arts organizations could benefit substantially from participating in this learning process, particularly in assessing the impact and alignment of their artistic vision with the experiences of the public.

- *What do Canadians value about the arts? What role do arts and culture play in their lives?*
- *Do findings confirm what arts organizations themselves believe they are offering the public in terms of meaning and worth?*
- *Do the relationships that arts patrons develop with particular works of art, artists, arts organizations, and art forms over time differ from other products and experiences?*
- *How and why do habits of arts consumption (or non-consumption) evolve over time?*

4. Foundational research on impact, development of preferences and the construction of meaning

There are many persistent and challenging research questions around the “black box” of impact – some of which extend well beyond the Canada Council’s need for evidence of its impact. Insights gained from serious attempts to address these questions and synthesize answers could significantly advance the field’s understanding worldwide of the intrinsic impact of the arts as a lived phenomenon. In its leadership role, the Canada Council could coordinate and collaborate with a variety of Canadian and international partners to take on some of these basic questions about impact, meaning and memory.

- *What explains why some people are attracted to certain art forms, but not others?*
- *What do people recall of their artistic experiences? Why do some experiences create indelible memories, while others quickly fade?*

- *How do people “make sense” of their artistic experiences? What interpretive frames are applied in the process of meaning making?*
- *What kinds of educational or enrichment activities magnify impact?*
- *How do preferences, familiarity, and reputation influence our responses to works of arts? How and why do tastes change over time?*
- *What is meaningful about arts programs? How does meaning differ across populations with different backgrounds?*
- *Does impact influence likelihood of future attendance?*
- *How significantly do social constructs influence attendance and repeat attendance?*



Impact Area 5: The long-term creative and social benefits to communities and society that stem from sustained investment in the arts

Many studies have shown that when people participate in the arts, society benefits. People in a society can become more connected, they can experience general feelings of wellbeing and a sense of belonging in their communities, and they can even become more creative at work.

Studies like these stop short of concluding that there is a cause and effect relationship between participation in the arts and benefits for society; there are simply too many other factors that could be affecting the people being studied. But studies do find that active participation in the arts tends to lead to societal benefits. This reinforces what artists and administrators working in the arts believe: that people who act on their right to an expressive life – participating in the arts either as audiences or creators – are happier and more fulfilled than those who don’t. (Most of these studies have been conducted by objective organizations outside the arts community, and not as part of arts-advocacy efforts.)

Policymakers, however, have to make tough decisions. When they are allocating scarce resources, they need to know how the social benefits from arts investments compare with the benefits of investing in other areas, such as education, sports, public health, transportation, public safety, etc. In turn, this has pressured arts advocates to explain arts contributions in economic and social terms that allow for some comparison. The Council will continue this measurement approach as part of its regular work, as this type of analysis does have a place in the Canada Council’s arsenal of evidence.

It is important to make a distinction here between community-level impact and societal-level impact. Societal impacts, such as wellbeing, also happen at the community level; but not all community-level impacts, such as a sense of belonging, happen at a societal level. Because arts participation is almost always local, some impacts will occur at the local level. Using our forest metaphor, community-level impacts are like habitats – areas within an ecosystem that have unique characteristics. The Canada Council wants to understand the impact of its funding across a portfolio of organizations and artists within a given community or habitat, and specifically the ways in which impact is shared or influences others.

Social impact as expressed in asset-based outcome rubrics

Scholarly work on the value of the arts to society over the past 30 years has produced a number of theoretical frameworks for cultural value, called either *cultural capital*, *creative capital* or, more recently, *creative capability*. These “asset-based” outcome rubrics tell us that the lived experience of arts, culture and creativity is a non-monetary public good. Instead of relying on indicators of social impact drawn from other fields, these rubrics define success in terms of outcomes that are specific to the arts, culture and creativity. They are also more relevant and focus the conversation on the impact of the arts.

Examples of these assets can include positive social dynamics around creativity, freedom from censorship, financial resources to spend on artistic materials, creative tools and resources, and networks to promote and share works of art. Successful outcomes defined in this manner hold the power to change the conversation about the impact of the arts. Research based on these rubrics may use both qualitative and quantitative methods.

With asset-based outcome rubrics, the quality and “amount” of the asset held by an individual, family or community can be observed, measured and tracked over time. Studies of cultural and creative assets frequently expose differences between various sub-populations. This prompts policymakers and funders to consider approaches and programs that might lessen these inequities.

Asset-based outcome rubrics assume that every human has, to some degree, the capability to be more engaged and accrue more benefits if they’re fully equipped and provided with relevant opportunities. This plays directly into policy claims about culture as a human right. It is particularly resonant in Indigenous communities, where the connections between arts and culture, and individual and community wellness have long been understood and honored.

To summarize, evidence of this area of impact would be found in:

1. Studies of community impact

The Canada Council’s funding is both broad and deep enough to warrant analysis of how its support affects arts ecosystems in cities and towns across Canada. Specifically, the Canada Council seeks to understand how impact is “more than the sum of its parts” in communities where multiple organizations and artists are funded. The Council is also sensitive that it provides funds and support to particular artists and organizations but still has limited reach within Indigenous and culturally diverse communities.

- *We hypothesize that communities benefit from arts organizations in ways that cannot be captured by simply summing up the responses that individual patrons have to arts experiences. Does this hypothesis stand up to empirical testing?*
- *To what extent do renowned artists, arts organizations, and festivals increase awareness and produce reputational gains for communities, domestically and abroad?*
- *Does funding multiple arts organizations in a single community lead to redundancies or symbioses across organizations, or both? If so, how does this work create a greater impact?*
- *How does the Canada Council’s funding interact with support that is provided by other public and private funders at the community level? What roles do the various funders play in the local arts ecosystems?*

2. Studies of the social impacts of arts participation

The Canada Council should take stock of existing research on social impact and consider how to fill any gaps through research partnerships. A challenge here is that much of the research on social impact focuses on active forms of participation rather than attendance-based participation, which is the primary interest of the Canada Council. One approach for gathering evidence of the arts' contributions to wellbeing is described in the next section.

- *In what ways does arts participation contribute to wellbeing?*
- *Do the arts contribute something to wellbeing that can't be achieved through other activities?*

3. Studies built on asset-based outcome rubrics (e.g. cultural capital or creative capabilities)

The Canada Council might take the first steps to consider collaboratively developing a new asset-based measurement approach together with other stakeholders. Any work on this issue within an Indigenous context would have to be undertaken carefully and in collaboration with Indigenous communities. This could lead to several pilot studies in the short term.

- *Are creative capabilities evenly distributed across the diverse communities of Canada?*
- *How are creative capabilities best discussed in Indigenous contexts?*
- *How are creative capabilities developed and maintained?*

Social benefits can arise locally, nationally, and even internationally, as seen in international relationships that are forged and supported through cultural diplomacy. The Canada Council makes significant investments in a number of international initiatives, which result in stronger international profiles of Canadian artists abroad, reciprocal relationships between the Canadian arts sector and international collaborators, and meaningful exchanges between artists and audiences across borders. These activities undoubtedly affect how we as Canadians see ourselves, how we are seen by others, and how we relate to the rest of the world. In this sense, the impacts of the Canada Council's international work are likely considerable, but we have not yet incorporated these impacts into the Framework.

Implementing the Framework

A Development Plan was prepared as a companion piece to the Impact Framework, providing the Canada Council with a roadmap for gathering evidence of its impact over the coming years. The plan delves more deeply into each of the five Impact Areas, recommending specific measurement approaches, identifying methodological challenges and opportunities, suggesting potential partnerships with other funders, agencies and research institutions, and establishing early priorities for implementation.

The various measurement approaches detailed in the plan take stock of the different ways in which the Canada Council's funding creates public benefit. The methodologies are all qualitative in nature, and pose several opportunities for funded organizations and artists to participate.

Our purpose in developing the Framework and identifying candidate measurement approaches was to illustrate the qualitative impact of the Canada Council's investments of public funds and to do so in a comprehensive way. In fact, the Canada Council's Research, Evaluation and Performance Measurement Section regularly conducts research and evaluation that will contribute a good deal of evidence to several of the impact areas. Any overlap with existing sources of evidence, however, is a happy coincidence; the Framework is not intended to repurpose or replace existing evaluation or performance measurement work.

The Impact Framework complements the logic models and outcomes of individual funding programs and offers an integrative, long-view perspective of the impact of the Council's investments.