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# A Leading Role: How Philanthropy Can Support Arts and Culture in Canada

*This is the sixth and final installment [in our series](#) about arts and culture philanthropy. The series is published as a collaboration between The Philanthropist and The Metcalf Foundation.*

A few years ago, at the Metcalf Foundation, we began to think about developing a new granting stream for our performing arts program. Recognizing the value of including members of the community in the design process, we decided to ask 100 Toronto artists a simple question: if you were given more money tomorrow, what would you do with it?

Responses came in swiftly. A significant number, most in fact, wanted one of three things: more time to make art, more money to better pay those who create the art, and more people to work on developing the art. For anyone working within the field of artistic practice these responses will not come as a surprise. Competition for resources is fierce and funding is unpredictable. Artists and arts organizations are constantly under pressure to source the means — time, financial, human — to meet their artistic ambitions and share the fruits of their labour.

As a Canadian dance artist, I have experienced firsthand how philanthropic giving can be a gamechanger. When I was artistic director of Dancemakers, we were once awarded a sizable donation at the conclusion of a one-hour meeting. Though hardly a common occurrence, the one-time gift made all the difference in our ability to bridge the gap between ambition and capacity. Since becoming a grantmaker in 2015, as Director of Performing Arts, Metcalf Foundation, I've gained further insights and perspectives into what makes philanthropy a natural dance partner for the arts and culture sector.

## **Risk and responsiveness**

The non-profit arts and culture sector in Canada relies on a combination of public, private, and earned revenues. Canada's robust network of public funders represents the largest source of funding revenue for the sector and supports a vast range of activities — from a one-off project by an independent artist to multi-year grants that underwrite an institution's programming. By necessity, public funders operate under strict demands of public accountability to ensure inclusive and fair access to public money. They do this by negotiating a set of measurements that encompass artistic excellence, financial health, and public impact.

Philanthropy's flexible governance and decision-making structures allow it to be more responsive to opportunities in shorter timelines. This also means it is well positioned to be able to accept higher levels of risk. Philanthropy can augment and complement public funding by filling in where there is a compelling need to act on requests where outcomes are less certain or respond quickly to a timely opportunity.

As Kelly Wilhelm states in this [series](#), philanthropy has greater freedom than the public and private sectors to experiment. "Foundations can take risks, invest in new areas, and develop

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replicable models.” Metcalf’s own Staging Change funding stream is designed to provide organizational support that favours innovation and adaptability. As a funder, this demands that we make the most of our tolerance for both the unknown and the unpredictable.

The amount of private philanthropic giving varies within the wider non-profit sector, but research by [Philanthropic Foundations Canada](#) (PFC) suggests that education and research, health, and social services receive almost half of all grant dollars. Arts and culture usually ranks fourth or fifth. In 2015, the 150 top Canadian grantmaking foundations that support arts and culture contributed a total of \$108 million. This does not include donor-advised funds or community foundations, which have a long history of supporting arts and culture. The total investment within the sector certainly exceeds this amount.

Though we may not know the exact size of philanthropic support for arts and culture in Canada, we do know it is considerable. As we have curated this series, we have been struck by what we see as a tremendous opportunity for arts and culture funders to partner and collaborate in ways that can strengthen and increase the impact of our efforts. This seems especially cogent given not only the amount of philanthropic dollars at play, but also the complexity of the issues facing the arts and culture sector. They range, as Kate Taylor notes in this [series](#), “from the proverbial getting ‘bums in seats’ when people might prefer to stay home with Netflix, to answering society’s call for diversity, gender equity, and reconciliation with First Nations.”

### **The issues that demand our attention**

Artmakers in Canada are deeply engaged in wide-ranging approaches to issues of accessibility, equity, reconciliation, and decolonization. As we saw in the third article in this [series](#) with, for example, Marcus Youssef’s *King Arthur’s Night* and Cris Derksen’s *Orchestral Powwow Project*, today’s artists are exploring ways to service a more diverse audience both prior to, and during, the arts engagement experience. Similarly, the philanthropic sector is starting to turn its attention to consider how equity-seeking and Indigenous communities see the world, what they need, and what they offer.

In his [2018 book, \*Decolonizing Wealth\*](#), Edgar Villanueva, an American expert on social justice philanthropy and a member of the Lumbee Tribe, provides a practical roadmap to restoring balance in philanthropy through Indigenous wisdom. Villanueva suggests that Indigenous sacred values of truth, humility, compassion, openness, listening, wisdom, and love hold great potential for philanthropy itself. These human-centric qualities seem like an ideal match for the very ethos that underlies arts and culture: the cultivation and stimulation of empathy and imagination.

Examples are emerging of public and private funders across Canada holding space and opportunity for Indigenous-led projects. In 2015, the Canada Council for the Arts, in partnership with the McConnell Foundation and the Circle on Philanthropy, launched the {Re}conciliation Initiative in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s calls to action. The support later morphed into the Council’s Creating, Knowing, and Sharing funding stream. The Inspirit Foundation also fosters reconciliation, in part by supporting change leaders working in arts and media.

### **Pathways for engagement**

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Those of us who fund arts and culture never stop asking ourselves an essential question: how can we best continue to deepen and diversify our relationship to the sector? It is an exhilarating challenge seeing as the range of aesthetic expression in Canada today is dizzyingly potent, with many avenues for consideration in addition to the traditional forms of opera, ballet, symphony, and museums.

For those who may be new to the idea of supporting arts and culture, you may have wondered how those individuals and family foundations, listed in playbills at performances and arts events across the country, determine how to align their own mandates and missions within such a varying and idiosyncratic landscape. In pragmatic terms, here are four entry points for participation along with several current examples of funding.

**Artistic development:** Artists need time to reflect, identify collaborators, and undertake early stage experimentation and development. The Theatre Centre in Toronto, the Banff Centre in Alberta, and Circuit-Est in Montreal are Canadian leaders in providing time, space, and dramaturgical support for new ideas. In addition to receiving public funding, each of them is supported by philanthropy, including the J.P. Bickell Foundation, the Slaight Family Foundation, and RBC, respectively.

Once a work is more fully realized, arts organizations turn their attention to the task of finding an audience. This can be achieved in partnership with one or more presenters or through a network of co-producers. The National Arts Centre's National Creation Fund is an excellent and innovative example of this kind of support. Twenty-nine projects have received funding to date, including such international hits as *Revisor* by Crystal Pite and Jonathan Young, and promising new productions such as *Treemonisha* by Volcano Theatre, and *Unikkaaqtuat*, a circus arts and Inuit founding myth collaboration by the 7 Fingers of Montreal, Artcirq of Igloolik, and Taqqu Productions of Iqaluit. The National Creation Fund was created thanks to individual, foundation, and corporate giving including a lead gift by Winnipeg philanthropist Gail Asper.

**Organizational capacity:** An organization is the entity that houses an artistic vision while also worrying about keeping the lights on, heating the studios, marketing the work, and paying folks for keeping it all going. Public funders have long supported organizational sustainability and growth through ongoing, reliable, and predictable operational funding. Philanthropy can play a welcomed and complementary role by augmenting capacity in one of two ways. The first is through strategic intervention. Metcalf's Staging Change program, for example, is a multi-year strategic initiative that supports new thinking and adaptive muscle building within an organization.

Alternatively, philanthropy can play a significant role in providing unrestricted operational funding that is connected to the often unglamorous, yet crucial, aspects of running the day-to-day business of arts organizations. When the Stratford Festival launched a capital campaign, in January 2018, for a new multi-use theatre, the case was successfully made to donors that it was as important to support the new centre's future ongoing operations through an endowment, as it was to find the money to build the facility (Nestruck, 2019).

**Leadership:** Over the past decade, institutional arts leadership in Canada has often been addressed by looking outside our borders. This has been due to a gap left by retiring senior leadership combined with an inconsistent pipeline for creating leadership opportunities that ensure Canadian talent can be developed here and stay here. Two leading examples to counter

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this trend are Calgary's Rozsa Foundation, which champions the arts through its arts leadership development programs, and Metcalf's performing arts internship program, which, since 2001, has provided more than 300 year-long internships in Ontario.

**Promising policy:** As Sandy Houston mentions in this [series](#), there has not been a substantial national examination of arts and culture since the Massey report in 1957. However, a recent series of 42 recommendations from a Senate Special Committee on the Charitable Sector — tasked in 2018 to learn how Canada could better support this important work — holds great promise. If two of the recommendations are adopted, the arts and culture sector will benefit greatly. The first is concerned with expanding the definition of activities that charities can undertake in a related business, especially regarding opportunities arising from new technologies.

The second, and most promising, would allow charities to make gifts to non-qualified donees in certain limited circumstances if the funds support exclusively charitable purposes (The Senate Special Committee on the Charitable Sector, 2019). This move alone could begin to shift the framework of the charitable sector from one that can seem preoccupied with compliance, toward one that is more enabling, such that an expanded pool of artists and arts organizations would be able to access philanthropic dollars. There is a definite opportunity for philanthropy to play a leadership role in supporting these kinds of policy shifts.

### **Philanthropy's gift**

In the spirit of the arts and culture sector, which thrives on new creative ventures, Metcalf recently developed an Ontario-based performing arts prize. The inaugural prize, to be awarded in December of this year, is named in honour of Johanna Metcalf, who passed away last year. Johanna was at the heart of the Foundation's work for 40 years and had a deep belief in the potential of culture for transformation.

The prize — which was the culmination of a long process of carefully considered options that originally began with our question to 100 Toronto artists: if you were given more money tomorrow, what would you do with it? — will be unrestricted. Laureates may use the monetary value as they see fit — be it towards time or other resources. The result is that recipients will be more likely to be able to bridge gaps between their ambitions and their capacity, and in turn continue to use their talents in service of others. This, we believe, is philanthropy's true gift.

### **Strength in numbers**

It is interesting to note that, based on PFC's research, the arts and culture sector receives approximately three times more in gifts than the environmental sector. Perhaps rising from necessity due to their smaller scale, our colleagues in the environment field understand the benefits of, and foster, ongoing collaboration. The Canadian Environmental Grantmakers' Network (CEGN) for example, brings together "private, public, community, and corporate foundations that share a desire to learn, collaborate, and leverage resources in pursuit of common priorities" (CEGN 2019).

At Metcalf, we believe the time is right for arts and culture philanthropy to do the same. To take a page from both CEGN and our many grantees in the arts sector who all rely on the power of collaborations. A network of arts and culture philanthropists, from across Canada, could provide

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opportunities to learn from each other's locally-gleaned insights and address the isolation that comes from being a small group in a massive country. We could build a community of practice, leverage our resources, contribute to advocacy and policy dialogue, and amplify our strategic interventions.

We believe that there is huge untapped potential among private philanthropy in Canada to respond to some of the urgent and complex issues of our times — climate change, wealth inequality, impacts of colonization, and gender disparity — with imagination, creativity, and a sense of boundless possibility. The parallels with the arts community, in terms of spirit and approach, could not be more striking. As Ravi Jain says in this [series](#), speaking of theatre, “it is a tool for social change, a way to inspire people to dream bigger, better worlds.”

Imagine what a more coordinated philanthropic investment in arts and culture could mean to artists, arts organizations, and Canadian culture. Will you join us?

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