

2021 EAC Investments in Organizations - Overview and Analysis

The Edmonton Arts Council's work is guided by *Connections & Exchanges: A 10-Year Plan to Transform Arts and Heritage In Edmonton*. The Ambitions, Aims and Actions outlined in the plan are driving the EAC's approach and decision-making in the renewal and retooling of its investment programs.

As the EAC builds structures and makes investment decisions for organizations, we are guided by the following Aim from Book 4 of *Connections & Exchanges: New and existing arts and heritage organizational capacity enables innovation and builds resilience in the sector*.

That work to build new structures was disrupted by COVID-19, as was the work of the organizations that produce and present arts and festivals in our community.

In response to the current need to balance stability and flexibility, as well as looking forward to the future envisioned in *Connections & Exchanges*, the Edmonton Arts Council's plan to support organizations for 2021 is based on three pillars:

- Sustain Investments for the immediate, short-term support of organizations to help maintain their existing capacity.
 - (see City Council report EXT00257 – this program is complete).
- Activate Investment to support organizations striving to build resilience through relevant activity, including programming in 2021 when possible.
 - The subject of this report
- Invent and Adapt Tools, resources, and potential investments to enable innovation around organizational structures, governance, and business models for the future.

The EAC is now recommending investments through the second deadline of *Activate* to support planned artistic and organizational activities in 2021 so these organizations can continue to pursue their mandates and goals.

This process followed the same basic process as the first deadline, which was outlined in City Council report EXT00550 from April 2021.

Activate: Major Themes

The following themes emerged from the assessment process at this second deadline.

Resilience and Realistic planning

- Most applicants are actively working to maintain their organizations and pursue their mandates and goals.
- The time elapsed between the deadlines allowed many organizations to present more coherent plans than their colleagues could at the January deadline. It then followed that those with less clear plans were not viewed as sympathetically.
- COVID-risk planning (or the articulation of that planning) remained inconsistent amongst the applicants.

Financial Shifts

- The relative impact of COVID-19 closures was more visible at this deadline. Financial contractions were more apparent, as year-end financial statements have begun to reflect the year of reduced activities.
- Several grant amounts have been recommended at lower levels because of this continued reduction in activity.
- Some organizations continued to pay artists, even when unable to program or perform. This was assessed positively.
- Assessors then debated an acceptable level of financial risk for an arts organization to have taken (or not taken) in these circumstances. No conclusion was reached.

Payment of Artists

- The pay of artists and staff was again a significant point of discussion for these assessors. This is not a new issue and was highlighted at the January assessment as well.
- Assessors wanted more guidance in the future to discuss and debate the relative value of different organizations, as many are not constituted to pay artists. What is the best way to compare the work of an organization whose primary mandate is to support or educate artists, versus an organization producing artistic work?

Activate: Funding Response

Following from the existing January assessment and outcomes, a similar set of categorizations were applied by the staff based on the assessment scoring and commentary.

11 organizations that assessors scored very highly and offered positive commentary regarding creative artistic, or programming activity are recommended for modestly increased investment as compared to 2020. This includes first-time grants to two new organizations that were strongly assessed.

19 applicants that demonstrated their resilience and perseverance to continue with some levels of activity and engagement and are recommended at a level equal to 2020 (Sustain and Activate grants taken together).

Five organizations had either significant reductions in activity, or other significant changes in financial or activity levels. They are recommended at reduced levels.

Three applicants are not recommended for investment from this process, mostly due to no eligible activity in 2021. They were presented to the GRT for discussion, but the not listed as part of this report for funding approvals.

Analysis

The community of arts and festival organizations has shown remarkable resilience. Many are actively working to pursue their goals, and those are recommended here for support at levels largely equivalent to 2020.

They are also deeply impacted by the pandemic and resulting restrictions. The majority have laid off staff, and significantly reduced the contracting of artists and arts professionals. Extraordinary Federal financial supports, including wage subsidies, have been instrumental in the partial maintenance of existing capacities. The impacts of COVID-19 will be felt for several years to come in this sector, both artistically and administratively.

2022 and Beyond

The Sustain and Activate investment streams are transitory in nature. While they were built in-part due to the unknowns the community faced for 2021, they were also created with an active eye to the future of EAC granting.

The EAC is actively building a new set of granting structures for 2022 and beyond, driven by the Actions found in Book 4 of Connections & Exchanges.