

Progress on Connections & Exchanges: A 10-Year Plan to Transform Arts and Heritage

Recommendation

That the February 17, 2021, Edmonton Arts Council report CR_6593, be received for information.

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the October 23/24, 2018, City Council meeting the following motion passed:

1. That Connections & Exchanges: A 10-Year Plan to Transform Arts and Heritage In Edmonton, as presented in Attachment 1 of the October 17, 2018, Edmonton Arts Council report CR_6355, be approved and that Administration work with the Edmonton Arts Council and Edmonton Heritage Council to implement the Actions as required therein.
2. That Edmonton Arts Council, with support from Administration, report back to Community and Public Services Committee on an annual basis on the progress of Connections & Exchanges: A 10-Year Plan to Transform Arts and Heritage in Edmonton for the duration of the plan.

Executive Summary

Following the adoption of *Connections & Exchanges: A 10-Year Plan to Transform Arts & Heritage In Edmonton* by City Council, the Edmonton Arts Council (EAC) has begun Phase I of the implementation of *Connections & Exchanges*.

In years one and two of *Connections & Exchanges*, the Edmonton Arts Council has identified and made progress on priority Actions. These Actions have focussed on reviewing the EAC's grant programs and increasing investment in artists and arts organizations, building internal capacity and technological infrastructure, leveraging partnerships within the City and community, and digital promotion of the arts.

Additionally, the EAC has had to pivot to adapt to the challenges for artists and arts organizations posed by COVID-19. The response has included information sharing for artists and arts organizations, sustaining grants for arts and festival organizations, and the launch of a Creators' Reserve grant program for individual artists, which saw a record-high response rate.

Connections & Exchanges also contains a Measurement, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework that is beginning to inform reporting. The MEL framework takes an innovative and leading approach to not only demonstrate the value of arts, culture and heritage investments and planning in the City, but to also take an intentional approach to how that work is done so that the sector, stakeholders, practitioners and the public can all benefit and learn from the process.

Report

Background

Connections & Exchanges consists of three Ambitions or visions for Edmonton in 2029. Each Ambition is further articulated as a series of eight Aims – tangible changes that the plan strives to generate. Each of those outcomes is backed by the plan's 55 strategic Actions to guide implementation efforts (23 specific Actions are assigned to the Edmonton Arts Council). Together, the plan's Ambitions, Aims, and Actions spell out the vision and destination of the plan, and provide the roadmap that will result in the transformational change of Edmonton's cultural landscape.

The *Connections & Exchanges* plan was developed over the course of approximately 18 months, and approved by City Council in late 2018 (CR_6355 from October 2018). Shortly afterwards, as part of budget allocations, new funds were added to the Edmonton Arts Council's base budget to support implementation.

The budget allocation for the first phase of implementation of *Connections & Exchanges* was \$5,000,000 over four years, with \$1,000,000 of that allocated towards Operational Capacity. In 2021, the EAC accepted a one-time reduction of \$621,000 to its granting budget to enable City Council to meet its 0% property tax target. This one-time reduction to the granting budget has compelled the EAC to delay specific investment plans to 2022. These investments are earmarked to the fostering of innovation in artistic and business models, as arts and festival organizations invent and adapt to a post-COVID reality. City Administration has committed to returning \$621,000 to the EAC's 2022 budget allocation.

Implementation To Date

Ambition: Alive with arts and heritage

Aim: Edmonton's neighbourhoods come alive with meaningful and relevant opportunities for participation and engagement.

Actions:

- *Conduct surveys to map local demographics, cultural events and participation to effectively deploy resources.*

- The EAC has hired a Manager of Research, Measurement Analytics and Learning, who is developing key performance indicators to allow us to monitor and measure the success of our work and the arts community.
- The Research and Data Plan will include the development of specific data points, the approaches to collect the data, the methodologies to analyze the data, and the strategies to report the results.
- The output of this Research and Data Plan will be data analysis and research products that track the implementation of *Connections & Exchanges*, measures corporate or departmental performance, and supports evidence-informed decision-making within the organization.
- The Research and Data Plan follows the guidance of the MEL Framework defined in *Connections & Exchanges* by outlining a mixture of six methods to collect data, reflecting the principle of stakeholder participation in conducting research, and highlighting the importance of streamlining & standardization of reporting.
- *Digitally promote and amplify neighbourhood arts activities to connect and celebrate cultural diversity.*
 - Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person activities were cancelled for public safety, and neighbourhood arts activities were limited. There are currently no immediate plans to resume in-person events due to public health restrictions. However, in the summer months, we adapted our popular “Festival in a Box” series for COVID-19, hosting socially distant, surprise pop-up parades in 20 neighbourhoods across the city, which brought arts engagement to a wide range of communities.

Aim: Arts and heritage leaders are actively engaged in civic planning and implementation.

Actions:

- *Work with City administration to explore the development of a “Cultural Placemaking” policy to support, anchor and celebrate artistic and heritage activity in the public realm.*
 - The EAC is working with City administration, specifically with the Department of Urban Form and Corporate Strategic Development on the renewal of the City of Edmonton’s Public Art Policy Suite (C458C, C547, C548, C549).
 - The EAC is an active partner with City administration on projects such as Downtown Vibrancy and the Downtown Public Art Plan.
 - The EAC is working with City administration on its Statutory Policy (C459).
 - EAC has commissioned a curatorial review of the Edmonton Public Art Collection that contextualizes the history of the collection, and makes recommendations for building the collection, education and outreach.

- EAC staff have also partnered with City administration to contribute to projects such as the Winter City Strategy, River Crossing, and the Orange Hub.

Ambition: A hub for extraordinary creation and reputation

Aim: Diverse platforms for collaboration exist within Edmonton that allow artistic and heritage communities to connect, create and collaborate.

Actions:

- *Convene the arts community to share expertise, promote collaboration and networking.*
 - The EAC hosted more than a dozen online professional development opportunities for more than 500 participants in 2020. This included sessions on topics such as CERB taxation, pricing strategies, and social media marketing, as well as information sessions on grants and public art programs.
 - We hosted sessions for the Mayor and City Councillors to hear from and address the arts community at the height of the pandemic in May. Approximately 150 individuals attended the live sessions, and the recordings have been viewed another 150 times.

Ambition: A thriving and well-funded arts and heritage ecosystem

Aim: Arts and heritage practitioners are economically resilient.

Actions:

- *Increase investment in artists working in a wide range of art forms and practices to foster experimentation, creative collaborations with community and public presentations.*
 - In 2019 and 2020 we committed reserve funds for direct investment in the community through the *Connections & Exchanges Initiatives* program, open to organizations that receive operating funding from the EAC. The total over two years was more than \$1.4M to organizations to pursue their own goals, aspirations and strategic plans that align with *Connections & Exchanges*. This included significant investment in work that was specifically and directly towards the development and engagement of artists (2019: \$204,000, 2020: \$217,100).
 - In 2020, partially in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the EAC made significant changes to how individual artists were supported. This included the Creators' Reserve program, and a revision of the Grants to Individuals and Collectives program to explicitly support experimentation. More detail is in the section about the EAC's responses to COVID-19.
- *Increase investment in artists and arts professionals from equity seeking groups.*

- In every grant assessment process, and every granting report to the EAC Board, equity and inclusion considerations are explicitly addressed.
- Every peer assessment panel is recruited and appointed with equity and demographic considerations at front-of-mind.
- The former “Cultural Diversity in the Arts” program was revised and replaced by the new “Equity and Access in the Arts” program. This came along with a 100% increase in the base annual budget for that program, to \$500,000.
- Other granting programs for individual artists and collectives were very responsive to artists from Indigenous and other equity-seeking backgrounds, in part due to the specialist staff from the EAC that work to engage those communities (see detail on page 5 regarding staff capabilities).

Aim: New and existing arts and heritage organizational capacity enables innovation and builds resilience in the sector.

Actions:

- *Build funding mechanisms for arts and festival organizations with an emphasis on multi-year operating grants; annual programming grants; commissions, co-productions and co-presentations of work by artists, ad-hoc groups, collectives and ensembles; dissemination and artistic exchange of work through tours, exhibitions and digital technologies; and, hosting artists and organizations from across Canada and the globe.*
 - The 2019 *Connections & Exchanges* Initiatives program (see also detail on page 3 above) invested reserve funds in existing arts and festival organizations. That support fell into several broad categories: Organizational Capacity (14 grants: \$391,400), Artistic Work (8 grants: \$204,300), Audience Development (9 grants \$234,600), (Community Engagement 9 grants: \$252,600),
 - In 2019 the EAC Board of Directors appointed the new Grants Review and Transitions (GRT) Committee with a mandate to oversee and coordinate direction to the EAC’s granting programs in alignment with the *Connections & Exchanges* plan. The GRT Committee includes EAC Board members and external members from the arts community who have met monthly, on average, over the past 18 months. A major part of their role is to oversee the planning, development and implementation of new investment structures.
 - The GRT Committee has also reviewed peer assessment results for organizations, individual artists and collectives to ensure alignment with the Aims and Actions in *Connections & Exchanges*, and present grant recommendations for ratification and approval to the EAC Board.

- In 2021 arts and festival organizations are being supported through transitional programs in response to COVID-19 and with an eye to implement multi-year operating grants, and the other structures outlined in *Connections & Exchanges*.
- *Invest in EAC operations to develop staff capabilities and technological infrastructure to manage investments, public art and conservation projects and customize digital platforms to measure and demonstrate the value and impact of the arts.*
 - Following the approved 4-Year Operating Budget of November 2018, we first identified the foundational needs and have driven towards building effective, efficient and impactful operational systems that equip our staff to take on the work of *Connections & Exchanges*.
 - The design of these systems and developments has followed *Connections & Exchanges* guidance in adopting a flexible, adaptive and iterative approach to implementation. This is not an activity focused on destination but the continuous improvement to our programs, services and partnerships that create transformative change.
 - In the first two years we have moved the organization towards transformative change internally and with the support of various consultants, including selecting a new online platform for our investments, relationship management and data integration, an in-depth organizational review, and a technology overhaul including improvements to data storage.
 - Our staff complement has been rounded out to include positions with a focus on strategy, investment and relationship building: a Manager of Research, Measurement Analytics and Learning, an Indigenous Relations Advisor, Equity and Inclusion Advisor, a Strategic Investment and Community Relations Specialist, and a new business manager at TIX on the Square.
 - Since hiring an Equity & Inclusion Advisor and Indigenous Relations Advisor, the EAC has worked to deepen and expand our understanding of the barriers faced by artists with workshops, artists talks, research, and direct dialogue with the community. We have hosted small round table sessions for individual artists to gather insight on how artists engage with the EAC currently and identify gaps in the community. EAC will use the input to inform further adjustments into our investment and support programs.
 - The Indigenous Principle in *Connections & Exchanges* signifies the way that the EAC approaches and considers our relationship and support for Indigenous artists in our region. Although an increasing number of artists of First Nations and Métis heritage are engaged with the EAC, our work

is still focused on outreach and awareness, alternate forms of support through pilot projects and one time projects, and coordinating our efforts with other organizations with parallel mandates, such as the City of Edmonton's Indigenous Relations Office, EPL, and the Edmonton Heritage Council.

- As we refine and integrate the principles and commitments of *Connections & Exchanges* into our work, we will continue this operational review in the systematic development of documented business processes, thoughtful deployment and capacity development of our staff, and operational redesign that better aligns the EAC to *Connections & Exchanges*.
- The EAC is transitioning to a new digital platform, which will allow it to integrate the myriad lines of business, including its granting and public art investments, as well as the community programming initiatives in the City. Services such as the sale of tickets and merchandise made by Edmonton artists and artisans through TIX on the Square will also be part of EAC's information management systems to demonstrate impact and drive Edmonton's transformative change.

COVID-19 response

- COVID-19 has had a major impact on the arts and festival community. Statistics Canada reports that nationally, as of December 2020, employment in the arts, entertainment and recreation sector was 31.9% lower, and total actual hours worked in-sector were 39.4% lower than a year before for the same period. This reflects what is being anecdotally reported in Edmonton.
- The EAC responded rapidly in the spring of 2020, first by publicly committing to supporting artists, and stating that existing grant commitments would not be impacted by COVID-19 related cancellations or postponements.
- With the engagement of the Board and the GRT committee, the EAC quickly invented and adapted programs, particularly in the support of individual artists. This included the Creators' Reserve program, and a revision of the Grants to Individuals and Collectives program to explicitly support experimentation, as directly outlined in *Connections & Exchanges*.
- Record numbers of applications were received for those programs (600+ to the Creators' Reserve alone in April) demonstrating the high demand for support to individual artists during COVID-19.
- The EAC partnered with the Edmonton Community Foundation to engage their financial support for individual artists. One aspect of this partnership was the Digital Arts Fund, which funded artist fees for digital presentations hosted by Edmonton organizations.

- The EAC hosted a taxation workshop for artists that addressed the tax implications of working from home, loss of income and CERB benefits. More than 100 individuals attended the online session.
- The EAC will also be hosting an online workshop on live performance for the virtual stage, to assist artists in adapting their work to digital platforms as public safety measures continue to impede public gatherings and performances.
- The EAC has been working in partnership with funders in Calgary and the researchers Stone Olafson on “The New Experience Economy” project to track Albertan audience’s ever-shifting attitudes to gathering and engaging during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have been hosting virtual sessions with the arts community to share those results.
- In 2021 arts and festival organizations are being supported through transitional programs in response to COVID-19 and with an eye on the future implementation of multi-year operating grants, and the other structures outlined in *Connections & Exchanges*.

Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management

- The *Connections & Exchanges* plan contains a MEL framework that is beginning to inform reporting.
- The Edmonton Arts Council is actively implementing a new digital information management system to standardize the collection of outcome measurements as part of the implementation and operationalization of *Connections & Exchanges*. That system is expected to be in operation for 2022.
- Using the MEL framework in *Connections & Exchanges*, the EAC will be able to provide progress on achieving the aims and actions of the plan in our annual reports and updates to City Council.

Corporate Outcome(s): . Edmontonians are connected to the city in which they live, work and play			
Outcome(s)	Measure(s)	Result(s)	Target(s)
<i>Conduct surveys to map local demographics, cultural events and participation to effectively deploy resources</i>	Spatial distribution of arts, heritage and cultural assets and experiences across the city (Including public art installations)	Mapping of public art and arts organizations has begun	Initial baseline to be established post-COVID

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<p><i>Convene the arts community to share expertise, promote collaboration and networking</i></p>	<p>Number of events held to connect sector practitioners</p>	<p>22 events were held in 2020: 9 round-table discussions with individual artists and 13 informational workshops (majority were online due to COVID restrictions)</p>	<p>Initial baseline to be established post-COVID</p>
<p><i>Increase investment in artists working in a wide range of art forms and practices to foster experimentation, creative collaborations with community and public presentations</i></p>	<p>Amount of investment in artists</p>	<p>Directly invested \$1,159,400 in 224 projects by individual artists in 2019</p> <p>\$2,270,200 committed to projects and work by 305 individual artists in 2020</p>	<p>Initial baseline to be established post-COVID</p>
<p><i>Build funding mechanisms for arts and festival organizations with an emphasis on multi-year operating grants; annual programming grants; commissions, co-productions and co-presentations of work by artists, ad-hoc groups, collectives and ensembles; dissemination and artistic exchange of work through tours, exhibitions and digital technologies; and, hosting artists and organizations from across Canada and the globe</i></p>	<p>Amount of investment in artists</p>	<p>Investments made in 242 organizations in 2019</p> <p>Investments made in 199 organizations in 2020</p> <p>We saw a decrease in the number of arts and festival organizations funded due to cancellations and closures for COVID-19. The number of organizations is also expected to be lower in 2021 than previous averages.</p>	<p>Initial baseline to be established post-COVID</p> <p>Arts and festival organizations are being supported through transitional programs in response to COVID-19 and with an eye to implement multi-year operating grants, and the other structures outlined in <i>Connections & Exchanges</i></p>

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<p><i>Invest in EAC operations to develop staff capabilities and technological infrastructure to manage investments, public art and conservation projects and customize digital platforms to measure and demonstrate the value and impact of the arts</i></p>	<p>Organizational capacity: sustainable funding models, use of technology, quality of management practices</p>	<p>Hired external firm to support organizational review and redesign</p> <p>New staff positions created with a focus on strategy, investment and relationship-building</p> <p>Improvements to technological infrastructure: new hardware systems distributed to staff as they work from home, moving to SmartSimple Software platform to develop new client management systems</p>	<p>Software updates to be complete by 2022</p>
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Attachment

1. Connections & Exchanges: A 10-Year Plan to Transform Arts & Heritage In Edmonton