

## Supporting Artists and Presenters in COVID Recovery

Submitted to the City of Edmonton - December 2023



*Magician and circus artist Jay Flair, photo by Levi Manchak*

A report on the use of \$1.2M by the Edmonton Arts Council, as allocated by Edmonton City Council at the City of Edmonton's fall 2021 "Supplemental Operating Budget Adjustment" to support Edmonton artists.

## **Introduction**

In late 2021, the City of Edmonton supplementary operating budget adjustment process included an allocation of \$1.2M in support of artists. This was in response to the real impact of COVID-19 and provincially mandated public health restrictions on the arts sector, and the desire to support venues and presenters to gradually make a return to vibrant gatherings in neighbourhoods across the city.

The Council debate about Mayor Sohi's motion laid out the following expectations:

- 100% of the funds be allocated to pay artists to perform and present.
- Support COVID economic recovery and the revitalization of Downtown.
- Help create vibrancy in neighbourhoods, and opportunities for safe gathering.
- Provide opportunities for equity-seeking artists through presentation fees.
- The Edmonton Arts Council would absorb program delivery costs within its ongoing operations.

Edmonton City Council adopted the following motion (10-2) after that debate:

*That the 2022 operating expenditure budget in Economic Investment Services, Urban Planning and Economy, be increased by \$1,200,000 on a one-time basis, to provide financial support directly to the artists and creators in Edmonton's cultural industries to perform and present their work to help aid COVID-19 economic recovery, with funding from the COVID-19 funds within the appropriated Financial Stabilization Reserve.*

The result was the April 2022 agreement (City Clerk file #105817) between the City of Edmonton and the Edmonton Arts Council to deliver funds to venues and presenters.

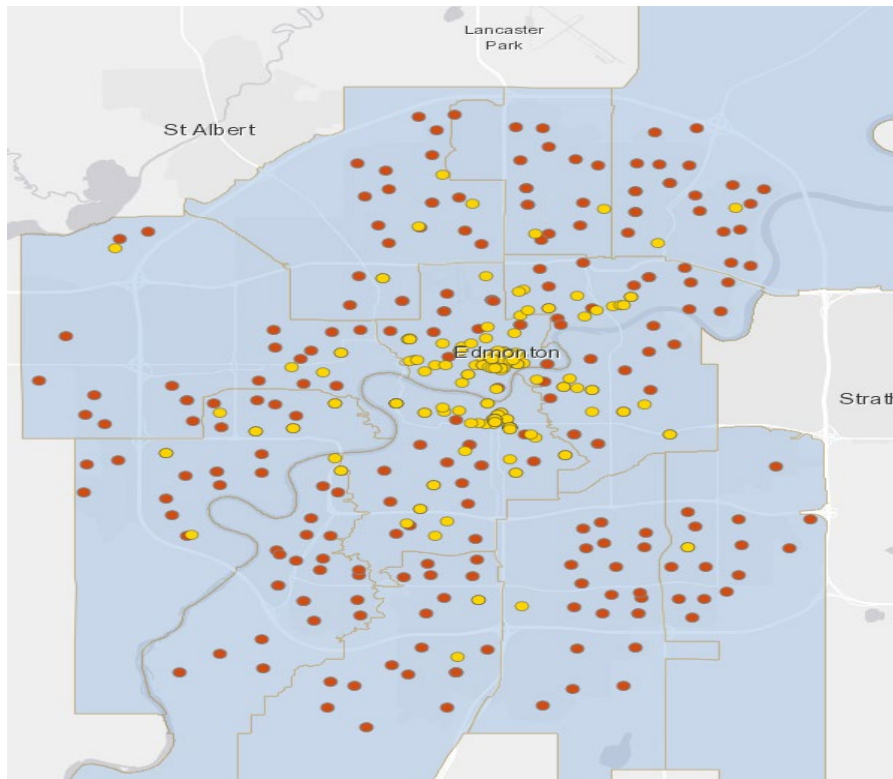
This report outlines the successful use of those funds, as envisioned by the City Council motion and the April 2022 agreement.

## Executive Summary

The funds were used in two specific ways: 1.) the Arts Presentation Fund for COVID Recovery grant program, and 2.) direct spending by the Edmonton Arts Council to support new and augment existing arts programming and neighbourhood activations. Both avenues were specifically directed toward the support of Edmonton artists for presentations and performances.

The **Arts Presentation Fund for COVID Recovery** grant program supported artist fees at events produced by **148** applicant organizations, of which 71 were new relationships for the Edmonton Arts Council. Venues and presenters reported audiences of more than 500,000 Edmontonians who attended more than **800** events in all parts of the city.

The **Edmonton Arts Council's direct spending** engaged artists to perform in community events and in partnership with the City of Edmonton's Green Shack program to bring performances to **205** neighbourhoods in the summer months of 2022 and 2023.



Map 1 – Combined APF Grant Program and Green Shack Show locations

## The Arts Presentation Fund for COVID Recovery (APF) Grant Program

### APF Summary

The Edmonton Arts Council allocated **\$1,080,217** to grants through the Arts Presentation Fund for COVID Recovery (APF) grant program.



*The APF Grant program supported the return of Shumka on Tour to the Jubilee Auditorium in October 2022*

The grants supported **148** venues, presenters, and other organizations to directly support artist fees at their events. The majority were performing arts events, with 74 identifying music as their primary artform. Grants ranged from \$300 to \$10,000 with the average grant being \$7,297.

Those presenters reported more than **2400** artist payments. EAC analysis shows more than **1100** of those are unique recipients (individuals or collective groups such as bands). With only a handful of exceptions for artists from nearby communities, all the artist fees went to Edmonton-based artists. Approximately **71** of the venues and presenters had not been previously eligible or supported by Edmonton Arts Council grants, including bars, churches, restaurants, clubs, and Community Leagues.

## APF Process

Starting on May 1, 2022, grants were available to presenters, including arts organizations, festivals, restaurants, Community Leagues and other presenters and venues for the sole purpose of compensating artists that reside in Edmonton and its neighbouring areas, for performance or presentation in Edmonton.

Applicants used the EAC's online portal to submit information about their plans, which were then reviewed by EAC staff to determine eligibility and viability as described in the program guidelines (attached). In many cases the EAC staff contacted the applicant to provide expertise and engagement, allowing new applicants and non-arts organizations to compensate artists respectfully and appropriately in keeping with the goals of this grant support. Grants were recommended and approved internally at the EAC.

Upon approval of the project, the EAC committed to the venue or presenter that funds to reimburse artists would be released upon receipt of a report. EAC staff provided significant support to applicants so they could provide suitable documentation and narrative reporting.

Final grant amounts were based on actual costs reported.

## APF Grant Program Observations

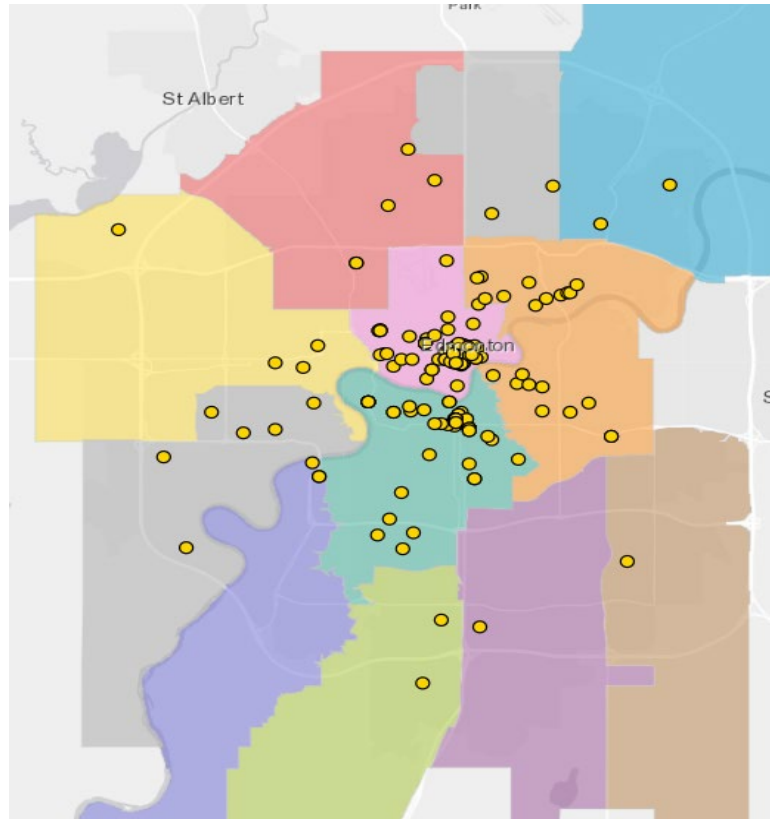
The active support of applicants led to a very high success rate in this program. EAC staff helped applicants ensure their materials were complete and viable. This included discussions regarding industry standards for artist fees and wages, venue booking specifics, information about equipment that might be required, and sometimes connecting organizations to each other for potential collaboration. When the applicants reported, the EAC also helped them ensure that information was complete and supported the maximum reimbursement of eligible artist fees they had incurred.

Audiences and opportunities for gathering – These events attracted many Edmontonians. A handful of major events were also supported, which influences audience figures. Even after removing the five highest reported audience figures that represent about half of the total audiences reported, there were still over 230,000 attendees, or about 1,650 per presenter supported.

Downtown and Neighbourhood Vibrancy – many of the events occurred in the core areas of the city, but there were events in every Ward (ref. Map 2). Twenty-seven (27) Community Leagues were supported that together reported at least 10,000 Edmontonians attending more than 50 of their events where 250 artists were supported by these funds. Much of that support was directed to artists that performed as part of Community League Day in the fall of 2022, increasing the vibrancy and impact of those events across the city.

While many of the presenters had existing relationships with the EAC, at least 71 (~47%) were new applicants that had not been eligible or supported in the past. This included Community Leagues, bars, clubs, restaurants, churches, and start-up events. A few examples are listed below.

- *Bao Restaurant* (in Old Strathcona) held a series of events over three months focused on a variety of live artforms including Chinese opera, visual artist talks, calligraphy presentation, poetry, tea ceremony, puppetry, and an Indigenous music presentation. English is a second language for the business owners, and they worked with staff at the EAC through their application and reporting.
- The *Cocktails and Jerk Festival* focused on Afro-Caribbean culture, was supported for music presentation through the APF. This has led to a new relationship with the EAC regarding establishing a non-profit – which is now called the “Small Axe Foundation.” They attended the EAC’s AGM, and we are helping them to connect with the broader festival community as they build their regular annual event.
- *Griesbach Community League* received support for their Community League Day events, which included entertainment for children and adults from various genres. A Mariachi band, clown troupe, and Indigenous drumming and singing from Chubby Cree contributed to it being hailed as “the best Party in the Park yet in Griesbach” as reported by the League themselves.
- While the *John Humphrey Center for Peace and Human Rights* was unable to generate an eligible project for the APF, their resulting connection with the EAC allowed us to guide them through another project program where they have been successfully supported.



Map 2 – APF Grant Program - event locations

### APF Grant Program Challenges

The EAC continues to receive inquiries about this program and its potential renewal. The one-time limitation on the funds and program means that the impacts are mostly short-term and may not yield sustainable changes to recipient's programming. Any renewal of this program would require a source of funds, which is not currently identified.

The program's impact was limited by the scope of allowable expenses. Expenses not supported by this program included venue rentals, sound equipment, or technicians required for live presentation. If this program were to be renewed under similar limitations, it would not sustain less established presenters without the necessary resources and capacity already in place.

The program's structure did not support the collection of demographic data about the artists supported. The sheer volume of artists, combined with the fact that the application and reporting was done by the presenting organizations, with no interaction between the EAC and the artists themselves, and no reliable way to match those artists with the available self-reported demographics the EAC collects regularly.

The reported information leads the EAC to believe that artists from a wide variety of equity seeking groups were supported – the presenters self-reported more than 400 artists that might meet those definitions - but any re-launch or renewal of the program will need to address this data-analysis gap.

Delivery of the APF Program, along with programming and neighbourhood activations, put an unreasonable amount of strain on EAC operations. It should also be noted that most venues, small businesses, and community presenters required dedicated EAC staff time to plan and deliver their arts programming, stretching staff resources. Any future renewal of the program and/or other Council directed initiative will need to include delivery costs to offset a strain on operations.



## EAC Directed Spending

### Summary

The Edmonton Arts Council allocated \$120,279 to direct spending on artists booked directly for events.

This included 212 presentations in partnership with the City's Green Shack program for kids, three special events on Churchill Square, and four EAC presented Park Pop-Up concerts. Together these events reached 205 different communities in 2022 and 2023.

In total, these EAC events supported 445 payments to artists over the two-year period.



*Green Shack Show in Central McDougall featuring the Northern Horn Quartet*

### Observations

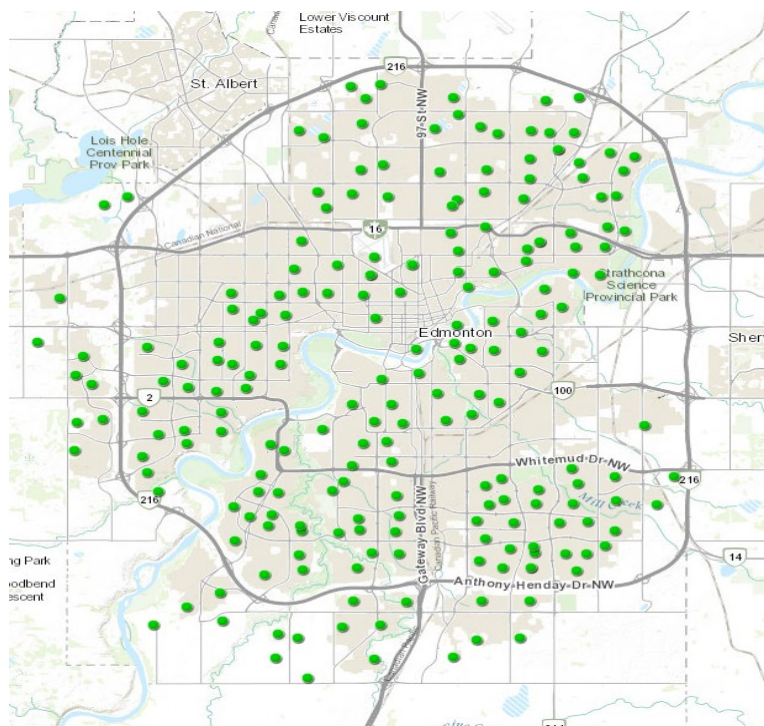
Throughout the summer of 2022 and 2023, the EAC's Community Animation and Creative Partnerships team hosted Green Shack Shows in neighbourhoods across Edmonton. While 245 shows were planned, approximately 20% were cancelled due to inclement weather conditions and poor air quality, and 212 shows were presented. The artists were paid for all 245 shows.

Attendance at the events varied depending on the location and the weather conditions, including air quality due to wildfire smoke. EAC estimates there was an average of 31 audience members per performance, which translates to over 6000 total attendees.

In contrast to the APF events that were driven by grant applicants, the EAC was able to ensure the events were geographically distributed to a wide range of neighbourhoods in every Ward of the City (see Map 3). The EAC was also able to target a broader range of art forms and demographics as compared to the grant program. This included puppet shows, street performers and circus artists, specialized theatre for young audiences, as well as several African and Indigenous performers.

Feedback for the Green Shack events was excellent, with grandparents and parents emailing us to say that their children enjoyed the events:

*“Today we were fortunate to find a French horn quartet at Riverdale community. They were amazing! It is so great for people to have access to the arts in unexpected places. It was the first time our grandchildren heard live music. The quartet played to the audience, and it was very enjoyable.”*



Map 3 – Green Shack Shows 2023 / 2024 (not including weather cancelled events)