

2021 EAC Investments in Organizations - Activate 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.
 - o (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.
 - o 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 *Activate* to support planned artistic and organizational activities in 2021 so these organizations can continue to pursue their mandates and goals.

Activate: Major Themes

The following themes emerged from the assessment process.

Resilience, Creativity and Sustainability

- Most applicants are actively working to maintain their organizations and pursue their mandates and goals.
- Pivoting to online work is one way of pursuing that work, and many applicants are exploring that avenue as a survival or bridging mechanism.
- Creative artistic ideas and operational activity, reaching out to new communities, and removing barriers of accessibility were assessed as very positive indicators of resilience and innovation.
- The organizations assessed most positively showed clear initiatives and activities that had either already demonstrated success, or presented good evidence to support their future success.

Isolation/Planning

- With very few exceptions the work of these organizations has a collective element.
- The inability to gather and the changing external environment is having significant impacts on the capacity of the organizations and the people to plan and pursue activity in a coherent way.
- The recovery of the ability to pursue the work will take time and effort, even after restrictions are lifted. Audiences may take longer to return, and skills will need time to re-develop.

Organizational Stress

- All these organizations have been constrained in terms of resources and ability to plan for any kind of future activity.
- The reduction in staff, contractors and activity has put the remaining people under significant stress, which is not easily or immediately measurable.
- In the words of one applicant "...not putting on the festival was more work than putting on the festival."
- It is also unclear how long this situation will persist, even after the direct impact of the pandemic passes.
- These stresses are evident, even when an organization was assessed as resilient and creatively pursuing its mandate.

Attachment 1

Activate: Categorization and outcomes

The following broad categories emerged from the assessment. These were largely independent of other factors, including discipline, size, or practice.

Category 1: organizations that assessors scored very highly and offered positive commentary regarding creative artistic or programming activity. These organizations demonstrated clear planning and thoughtful approaches to the work they are undertaking.

Outcome:

- Investing in resilience and innovation.
- 14 applicants recommended for increases based on 10% of 2020 amounts, capped at \$3000 increase.

Category 2: consists of 75 applicants that demonstrated their resilience and perseverance to continue with some levels of activity and engagement. These groups found ways to pivot, or move to alternative presentation modes, but the artistic or community outcomes are still in some degree of progress.

Outcome:

- Supporting existing capacity and resilience.
- recommended for equal amounts to 2020.

Challenges: a small block of applicants who submitted inadequate information, or had no plan to proceed in 2022, or needed special responses for 2021 as a result of the assessment.

Outcomes:

- recommended with conditions; or,
- not recommended and invited to re-apply at summer deadline; or,
- not recommended with active engagement or other supports; or,
- not recommended.

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. The financial stability that appears on the surface is underpinned by Federal and Provincial supports that did not exist a year ago. The return of earned revenue is a significant unknown.

The impacts of COVID-19 will be felt for several years to come in this sector, both artistically and administratively.