



Advocacy Report

February 2015

We continue to work with the Visual Arts Alliance on funding policy issues at the national level and to propose and sponsor research that improves data on the status of the visual arts and artists in Canada. We support the tremendous efforts of the Canadian Arts Coalition, who now provide the federal budget analysis formerly undertaken by the Canadian Conference for the Arts, and participate in the Coalition's annual "Day on the Hill" to lobby the federal government for improved funding in the arts. Through both the Alliance and the Coalition the RCA contributes to pre-budget submissions made to the Finance Committee.

Advocacy also attends the annual National Arts Service Organization's (NASO) meetings organized by the Coalition and the Canada Council for the Arts. Unlike most organizations represented, the RCA receives no organizational funding from the Canada Council. As the oldest visual arts organization in Canada with more than 700 members who may be affected by the results of policy decisions made as a result of these consultations, it is important that the RCA have a voice at the table.

In the fall of 2014, the Canada Council Visual Arts section initiated a series of operating program consultations with community members in ten locations across the country that wound up at the end of November. These consultations are part of a review process that all arts sections undergo at different times, the visual arts among the most recent. Details of the process and its findings have not yet been shared, and this is of some concern to the Visual Arts Alliance.

On January 20th, 2015, sweeping changes to the existing granting program for all arts sections, to be implemented by 2017, were announced the new Executive Director of the Canada Council, Simon Brault, at its Annual Public Meeting. The announcement proposes a reduction of the number of grant programs administered by Council from 142 to less than 10 "national, non-disciplinary programs". Details of the proposal, "Towards a New Funding Model", can be found on the website www.canadacouncil.ca.

Several member organizations of the Visual Arts Alliance are concerned about the how this radical new model was arrived at, given the absence of consultation with constituents. There are many questions surrounding the proposed changes to the funding model, such as how the drastic reduction in grant programs will affect the peer assessment process currently done within disciplines.

ARCA, a member of the Visual Arts Alliance, has issued a communique www.arccc-cccaa.org/en/ outlining its concerns.

There is some sense that the Canada Council is acting under pressure to satisfy criticism in the last Auditor General's report that there are too many programs at Council. The new non-disciplinary operating model has seven streams designated so far: production, ongoing programming, national touring, international touring, market development, aboriginal program, and support for the arts sector. Whether these streams can negotiate an equal, if not improved peer assessment process within different disciplines, each with vastly different means of production, remains to be seen.

Referring to Simon Brault's book, *Le facteur C: l'avenir passe par le culture*, translated as *No Culture, No Future*, James Bradshaw (*Globe and Mail*, Dec. 04, 2009) stated, "Brault's main thesis is this: if we don't take drastic action to encourage broad-based, grass-roots cultural engagement, state support for the arts will face a crisis of legitimacy because everyday participation in the arts is declining."

This perspective is evident in the streams devoted to "market development" and "support for the arts sector", both of which will require a more public intervention by the Canada Council. In its radical re-structuring of Canada Council programs and operations, this new funding model is not without risks: It will require strong leadership and commitment if it is to also support a high level of professional achievements in the arts.

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