

Standing Committee on Finance (FINA)

Pre-budget consultations 2012

Independent Media Arts Alliance

Responses

1. Economic Recovery and Growth

Given the current climate of federal and global fiscal restraint, what specific federal measures do you feel are needed for a sustained economic recovery and enhanced economic growth in Canada?

IMAA is a national network of independent media arts organizations. Media art encompasses film, video, audio and new media. Independent means that the artist initiates and maintains complete creative control over the work. As our world becomes increasingly saturated with digital devices, screens, and tools, there are an increasing number of people using media art as a form of creative expression. Numerous studies have proven that investing in the cultural sector creates jobs, contributes enormously to the GDP, provides Canadians with an enhanced quality of life, creates vibrant cities that foster economic growth and attract foreign investors. This was recognized in the 2012 federal budget by maintaining funding to the Canada Council for the Arts (CCA) during a time when deficit reduction was prioritized. So much more could be done to enhance this already dynamic and innovative cultural sector that intrinsically reaches all Canadians. Media artworks are made for all screens from cellphones to large theatres and organizations work tirelessly to connect these works with audiences everywhere. The media arts sector is growing even without increases to operating funding. We are a thriving sector and would be a profitable investment. The Media Art section at the CCA is the prime national funder for media artists and organizations. However, the media art section is one of the lowest funded sections at the CCA given that media art, relatively speaking, is one of the younger art forms under the cultural umbrella. Media art has rapidly grown into a pivotal field, directly linked to all other disciplines, in addition to being a current and engaging art form in itself. Media art is interconnected with technology and contributes significantly to scientific research and development such as computer vision and image recognition and the creation of digital interactive environments. In its 5 year Strategic Plan, the CCA stated an "increased focus on the impact of the transition to a digital society on the arts." We recommend that the federal government increase funding to the Canada Council for the Arts in order to provide enhanced economic growth through further investments into its media art section.

2. Job Creation

As Canadian companies face pressures resulting from such factors as uncertainty about the U.S. economic recovery, a sovereign debt crisis in Europe, and competition from a number of developed and developing countries, what specific federal actions do you believe should be taken to promote job creation in Canada, including that which occurs as a result of enhanced internal and international trade?

There are hundreds of artist-run organizations located in all parts of Canada. These include festivals, production centres, art galleries, educational centres, and distribution centres. Combined, they employ a significant number of cultural workers most of whom are young and highly skilled, with half under the age of 35. Like so many non-profit arts organizations, these centres are under-staffed yet manage to provide excellent services and support to their communities. Not only do they provide valuable administrative training to their staff, they also provide:

- Hands-on training opportunities in media art production to recent graduates, to the general public, as well as to other target groups such as youth at risk
- Workshops for emerging artists to foster expertise in business management and other skills

related to being an entrepreneur • Consulting services to small film companies and independent artists • Training to enable artists to be “market ready” for Canadian and international markets • Support for research and development in the field of new media • Educational programs, summer camps for schools and community groups These centres are the incubators for the larger film industry. They also provide the basis for independent artists to develop as entrepreneurs and maintain a professional practice. These centres receive minimal support from the Canada Council for the Arts to sustain their basic operating expenses, which is then used to leverage funding from other sources, including the private sector. Job creation programs such as the CHRC Youth Internship Program are used and valued by artist run organizations, but without increased capacity through operating funding, jobs created by these programs are not sustainable. Funding to the Canada Council for the Arts must be increased to match job creation programs which is guaranteed to have positive spin-off effects in multiple ways from establishing artists as entrepreneurs to creating a workforce with specialized skills.

3. Demographic Change

What specific federal measures do you think should be implemented to help the country address the consequences of, and challenges associated with, the aging of the Canadian population and of skills shortages?

The federal government has focused on immigration as an important approach to address the issue of Canada’s aging population. Media art has a valuable role in encouraging social cohesion and integration by building bridges between various cultural communities through its festivals, and other artistic programming that welcomes participation from distinct cultural groups. Culturally specific media arts festivals are emerging in towns and cities across Canada. Examples include aluCine featuring Latin artists living in Canada, Latin America, and the diaspora, Reel Asian showcases contemporary Asian cinema and work from the Asian diaspora, and Regent Park Film Festival showcases independent works that reflect key themes such as, immigration, inner city issues, cultural identity and multicultural relationships. These are only a few of the growing number of festivals that aim to foster social cohesion and cultural creativity. Media art productions can also describe and reflect Canada and its value systems to new citizens. Artist-run production centres enable people to work in film, video and new media to tell stories about their experiences in Canada, or abroad and encourage a better understanding of who we are as a nation, and what we choose to project to other nations. Media art is a very conducive art form to do this as it can be easily disseminated. As outlined in Question 2, artist-run organizations provide valuable training to a wide range of the Canadian population relative to both long-standing audio-visual technologies as well to the ever-evolving field of new media and digital technology. Increased investment to the Canada Council for the Arts would enable these artist-run organizations to purchase up to date equipment and to offer affordable workshops to Canadians.

4. Productivity

With labour market challenges arising in part as a result of the aging of Canada’s population and an ongoing focus on the actions needed for competitiveness, what specific federal initiatives are needed in order to increase productivity in Canada?

While the notion of productivity for the media arts is not as tangible as in other industries, there is a considerable role that the media arts sector has as a research and development laboratory for the larger industry. Innovation, research and creative development in the arts stimulate ideas, concepts and approaches that would otherwise not be developed. These concepts and artworks are sought after by advertising agencies, companies in other sectors as well as the entertainment industry and penetrate into society at large. A timely example is the 2012 Emmy Award nomination of Canadian media artist Andrea Dorfman's film "Flawed" in the “New Approaches to News & Documentary Programming: Documentaries” category which was broadcast on PBS’ POV. Dorfman's career began with support from

the Atlantic Filmmakers Cooperative, an artist-run centre in Halifax, NS. As a lifetime member of the centre, she continues to be a dedicated volunteer and lead instructor and mentor in film production training programs at AFSCOOP. Canada is home to several internationally recognized media artists whose early career success is largely accorded to the Canada Council for the Arts and who have now become self-financing companies. Montreal-based electronic artist Rafael Lozano Hemmer has artworks being exhibited and collected by major institutions and private collectors around the world. His self-generated revenues allow him to run a company with 10 full-time employees. Getting a company like this "off the ground" requires sustained support in the early development phase. With a rapidly growing number of applicants to the Media Arts programs at the Canada Council for the Arts, competition has become so excessive with a success rate of only 10%, far too many budding artists are being denied the seed money necessary to grow their companies. There is tremendous potential for Canada to become a world leader in media art cultural production which can only be achieved with further investments to the Canada Council for the Arts. By increasing investments into the Canada Council for the Arts and to Telefilm, the NFB for their independent programs, this sector could rapidly develop into a healthy, sustainable segment of the creative economy.

5. Other Challenges

With some Canadian individuals, businesses and communities facing particular challenges at this time, in your view, who is facing the most challenges, what are the challenges that are being faced and what specific federal actions are needed to address these challenges?

Funding is extremely limited for artists and organizations working in film, video, audio and new media, yet it continues to grow and has an exciting and important role within the social fabric. As a relatively young art form, media art welcomes the challenge to deepen its roots and strengthen its support structure by connecting with potential funders. Public investment is key to creating the stable ground from which to evolve but we also anticipate focusing significant efforts on developing relationships with alternate funding sources, foundations and the private sector. Canada has a limited amount of arts benefactors as compared with our US counterparts and for a young sector, it will be unfeasible to access support from foundations and philanthropists who have longstanding relationships with existing stakeholders in other fields. Therefore, the federal government must take an active role in creating impetus for new philanthropic activity and improved incentives for sponsoring the arts. An excellent example of an initiative that is still in a development phase is artsVest which is Business for the Arts' matching incentive and sponsorship training program, designed to spark new business sponsorship of arts and culture and to build capacity in Canada's cultural sector. artsVest does not currently operate in all parts of Canada, but is working to do so. The IMAA also supports Imagine Canada's recommendation to the Standing Committee on Finance to establish a stretch tax credit for charitable donations. The purpose of the Stretch Tax Credit for Charitable Giving is to encourage more Canadians to give and to support those who do give to give more. We agree with Imagine Canada and the Canadian Conference of the Arts, that the federal tax credit for charitable donations should increase from 29% to 39%. This would also work hand in hand with programs such as artsVest. With targeted investments to the Canada Council for the Arts and in creating incentives for increased support of the arts, the media arts would be well positioned to contribute to Canada's economic growth while being a shining example of what our country is capable of as an innovative and creative society.