

**Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage  
Cultural Hubs & Cultural Districts in Canada**

**April 29, 2018**

**Respectfully Submitted by Rosebud School of the Arts, Executive Director, Frank Nickel, and Board of Governor Chair, Jack Hayden**

**1. What is your definition of a cultural hub/cultural district?**

A cultural hub is a place, organization, town or centre where the primary focus of those working and living in that area is culture. The Arts organization (read "Cultural Hub") in Rosebud is the "company" in a company town - not unlike the coal mine towns of the early 1900s that made a life for miners. The hamlet of Rosebud makes a life for artists, service staff, B&B operators, and artisanal craft shops. Without the cultural focus, it is doubtful Rosebud would exist today? It is in this lens that our definition of what a rural cultural hub looks like.

A cultural hub also indicates that this is a place where various arts and culture intersect, and as they intersect with each other and with the wider community a synergistic effect is created. Cultural hubs impact their communities and stakeholders in ways that are more than the sum of their parts. Cultural hubs inform who we are, where we come from, how we relate to one another, and finally where we are going. As is so eloquently quoted on our \$20 bill by Canadian author Gabrielle Roy, "Could we ever know each other in the slightest without the arts?" The Arts Commons in Calgary is cultural hub, as is Old Strathcona in Edmonton, and of course Granville Island in Vancouver.

Rosebud, Alberta is another kind of cultural hub, even though it is a hamlet of only 100 people located an hour outside of Calgary. Despite its size and remote location, over 30,000 cultural tourists and locals are drawn to Rosebud every year. The core of our mission at Rosebud School of the Arts/Rosebud Theatre is "to enrich lives". We enrich the lives of our students by training the next generation of the theatre professionals to be "catalysts for transformation in our world", and we enrich the lives of the wider community (our patrons) by "presenting live theatre that illustrates the beauty and complexity of life through an inclusive grace-filled perspective". In other words, we put on plays, educate aspiring artists, cook delicious food, sell one-of-a-kind artisanal wares, and offer hospitality as an entire community. This is Rosebud, one of Alberta's cultural hubs, and its only rural example in operation today.

**2. What role can the government play to help cultural hubs?**

The most important role government can play in helping cultural hubs is by way of support. Culture-makers don't typically pass laws and sit in parliament, but the impact cultural hubs have on society at large in turn impacts law-makers and those that sit in parliament. Our society is always being impacted by the arts whether you turn on your computer, sit down at the end of a long day and watch something on Netflix, go to a movie, or join friends for dinner and a concert. We can't escape it. Arts and culture are always making an impact on us. Sometimes it might be just an image we see on the side of a bus that stays with us, and sometimes it might be a live concert or a piece of theatre that impacts us so much our that the actual cellular structure of our brains are altered. We can be transformed by culture, but those opportunities for cultural enrichment need to be recognized and supported.

A second way government can support cultural hubs is by recognizing them as such. Just as highway signs or google maps let people know where National Parks are located, so too could the government formally acknowledge where Canada's cultural hubs are located and what areas of the

arts are a feature of that location. For example, Banff is home to protected National Parks, but it also home to Banff Centre for the Creative Arts, with some of Canada's most inspired cultural events take place. How can the government support both of these national treasures to prospective tourists from across our own country, and indeed, the world?

### **3. What are the greatest obstacles to creating, maintaining, and expanding culture hubs/districts?**

Without question the greatest obstacle to creating, maintaining and expanding cultural hubs is money and support. In Rosebud, patrons pay \$80 to come and have their lives enriched through the offerings at Rosebud Theatre. This ticket price excludes many Canadians from benefitting from the type of cultural experience we offer. Rosebud School of the Arts students pay over \$7500 in tuition for training every year. Affordability plays a major role in sustainability for all cultural organizations, but this reality is exacerbated for many young people.

To be successful, and sustainable, cultural hubs require two primary things:

- A community with whom their form of culture-making is shared. Art-making doesn't find it's full meaning until it is shared with a community or an audience. In other words, cultural hubs need people both behind the stage, and in front.
- The economic & financial means to create, market, and produce their offerings, whether it be music, opera, dance, theatre, or... whatever culture making they are engaged in. This includes resources, facilities, marketing, staff, and business leadership.

To create a community, a patronage, with whom to share arts and culture, cultural hubs must have the means to organize themselves, to let people know that the cultural hub exists, and the means to facilitate it. Overcoming these hurdles has been the greatest challenge facing cultural hubs since cultural hubs began to self-organize decades ago.

### **4. What are the benefits in bringing different organizations together into a cultural hub/district?**

Bringing different cultural organizations together into a cultural hub allows several synergies to take place. Those who come to share arts and culture can do so at one centralized place. In a cultural hub a patron can go to an art gallery, have dinner listening to a live string quartet ensemble, and see a Shakespeare play all in one walkable location. There are a myriad of other examples to draw from, but the ideal cultural hub blends diverse artistic practices, talents and opportunities into a single experience.

Multiple organizations would also be fueled by one another, exposing each unique artistic practice to other artists, in turn, creating new artistic practices and experiments. It also presents the immediate opportunity for organizations to work together, share common expenses, and expand the boundaries of their own art-making through collaboration. Rosebud School of the Arts is made better by their intersection with Rosebud Theatre, and the reverse is true as well.

I think it also must be said that cultural hubs must be allowed to bloom organically where they do. There was a time when Granville Island was 100% industrial, and Rosebud was a dying dustbowl town with boarded up buildings and only about 15 residents. There are many, many examples where a community is transformed by artists who can see beyond the exterior and who have a vision for what could be. Budding and established cultural hubs must be supported by government if the Canadian people are to retain their identity in the global community.

Respectfully Submitted  
Rosebud School of the Arts