



Cultural Hubs and Cultural Districts in Canada

Submission to the House of Commons Standing
Committee on Canadian Heritage

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BACKGROUND

Since 1924, the Canadian Association of Fairs and Exhibitions has represented almost 800 fairs and exhibitions across Canada. These events vary in size from rural one-day fairs to 14-day urban exhibitions. In total, our events see *35 million visitors each year*.

We are a national charitable organization dedicated to supporting fairs and exhibitions by developing programs, resources and services, building partnerships with key stakeholders, encouraging collaboration and innovation and collectively raising the awareness and profile of the industry.

OVERVIEW

The majority of our events have been around for decades and therefore hold deep cultural roots and traditions within their communities. Generations of families have been involved as volunteers, participants or visitors.

- 89% of fair visitors agree fairs are a major social gathering for the community (Source: CAFE Economic Impact Study, 2008)
- 94% of visitors agree events like these are important to Canadian traditions (Source: CAFE Economic Impact Study, 2008)
- 88% of visitors agree these events enhance the quality of life for people living in the region (Source: CAFE Economic Impact Study, 2008)

Likewise, our events are key opportunities to involve all ages in civic engagement, whether it is volunteering for the event or for an organization attending the event, even the smallest fairs and exhibitions easily see 150-300 volunteers engaged each year, whereas larger events gather 3,000-5,000 volunteers.

Often, it is the one event of the year that not only brings together the entire community but is a driving force for economic stimulation, averaging an economic impact of \$17.2 million on the local economy per fair overall. Whereas small fairs alone average \$750,000, which in a small town represents a huge boon for business.

The strength of our events comes from their creative, rich backgrounds, which are complemented with modern innovations, education and entertainment. Our events have been at the forefront of technological innovation and educational exchange for decades, having in the past been the only place where this information could be sought. Many people saw their first television, or a record player, at a local fair. Today, while individuals can find information elsewhere, it has not prevented our events from offering top-notch educational opportunities, particularly in relation to technology, agriculture and healthy living. More than 50 per cent of individuals say the educational component of our events enhances their visits and the top educational reasons for visiting fairs include: healthy eating, food safety, cooking and food preparation and agriculture and farming.

Furthermore, as cited at a Parliamentary Heritage Committee meeting, the definition of culture is expanding:

“According to the 2017 “Culture Track” study, an initiative of U.S. based consultancy company LaPlaca Cohen, audiences no longer distinguishes between “high” and “low” culture. For the

cultural consumer, a street fair is equal value to attending an opera. The visitor measures a successful experience by way of learning, doing something new, finding enjoyment and fun, and being socially engaged.”

Finally, we are one of the few events that offer real, authentic experiences that still see children and families get outside and do something, whether it's riding the midway, visiting animals or playing games, to name a few examples.

RECCOMENDATIONS

- **Educate boards and volunteers**

The majority of organizations in our industry are board-led and volunteer driven. While some have experience and education in working with boards and in volunteer settings, many are well-intentioned individuals looking for heartfelt ways to support and engage in their community. These individuals have a wide variety of backgrounds that are beneficial to the organization, but they can lack some fundamental organizational and operational skills that lead to success and increased efficiency. If the government offered more tools, resources and workshops on successful boards and defining volunteer characteristics, it would yield a significantly positive result for all fairs and exhibitions across Canada.

- **Fairs and exhibitions be actively recognized as cultural hubs**

Our events bring together a variety of Canadian talent, experiences, and innovations. Some examples include the “Rising Star Talent Competition” at the Canadian National Exhibition, the countless handicraft competitions at smaller fairs, food festivals, artisan showcases, and much more. However, we have not received recognition as cultural hubs. Too often fairs are categorized as farm fairs that solely host animal competitions and perhaps a midway. The majority of our events have diversified and expanded to reflect the life and times around them, and being supported as cultural hubs is necessary for the survival of these events. Therefore, we would urge the committee, the Department of Canadian Heritage, and across government to consider fairs and exhibitions as vital cultural hubs.

- **More flexibility in the language of funding and granting opportunities**

While we understand the need for clear structure and limitations in the grants and funding opportunities offered by the Department of Canadian Heritage, too often funding that fairs and exhibitions seemingly could apply for is restricted to us. For example, infrastructure funding is not accessible to many organizations because they rent rather than own the grounds. These organizations have decades-long leases with the grounds owners and are responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the buildings, however are ineligible for funding. Another example is festival funding: while some fairs are successful in receiving funds, often the fairs are beholden to the perception of not having enough local activities, or not representing enough arts activities at their event, when as explained above, sometimes these are the only places where local arts are showcased.

- **Assist in data collection**

One of the major struggles non-profit and charitable organizations have is defending their influence and impact on Canadian society. Impact studies are incredibly expensive, although very beneficial to the organization. The last study CAFE completed was measuring economic impact in 2008. It has proven to be very useful to us, but cost close to \$600,000, and is therefore not something we can afford to do on a regular basis. Government resources to help non-profit and charitable run independent studies. Whether these resources be financial or human, would prove invaluable both for our organization and those connected to fair and exhibition operation.

- **Increased operational funding**

Our industry needs further operational funding because thriving fairs and exhibitions depend on adapting to the changing landscape. As we are a service-based, non-profit organization, we are limited in the core funding we receive, and so – like organizations across the creative and culture industry – further operational funding would allow us to ensure a secure, stable organization that can meet the needs of our industry, with the potential to grow and develop.

CONCLUSION

The Canadian Association of Fairs and Exhibitions (C.A.F.E.) is proud that our events across Canada, from Salt Spring Island, B.C. to Charlottetown, PEI and everywhere in-between, are well-established community events that have become annual cultural and social gatherings that offer education, entertainment, and family fun. We hope we have impressed upon you the value of these community events, and we urge you to think of your own local fairs and exhibitions and how they are truly a part of the cultural fabric of your community. Many fairs and exhibitions have histories longer than Canada itself, and have become instruments of civic engagement, leaders in tourism, and important economic drivers within their communities. We offer authentic and local educational experiences. We want to make sure children for generations to come are able to enjoy the unique experiences that only our fairs and exhibitions can offer.

About CAFE

The Canadian Association of Fairs & Exhibitions (CAFE) is a registered charity established in 1924 and funded primarily by its members. CAFE represents about 800 fairs and agricultural societies across Canada. The organization represents a broad spectrum of fairs from small community rural fairs to large urban exhibitions. In addition, the membership includes provincial associations that represent agricultural societies from across Canada, industry service providers and affiliate associations who have a direct interest and link with the Canadian fair industry.

Our mission is to foster excellence in leadership within the Canadian fair industry by:

- *developing programs, resources and services;*
- *building relationships and partnerships with key stakeholders;*
- *encouraging collaboration and innovation; and*
- *collectively raising the profile and awareness of the industry.*

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