

Canadian Arts Coalition's Supplementary Brief for CHPC:

Gender Parity in the Canadian Arts Sector and the Barriers to Women's Leadership May 31, 2018

The Canadian Arts Coalition is a collaborative non-partisan movement spearheaded by a group of national arts service and membership organizations. Collectively, we represent thousands of artists and hundreds of arts organizations from across the country.

There are approximately 650,000 arts workers in Canada, with women representing 51% of all artists and 50% of cultural workers.¹ Women (cis and trans) play a central role in the creative industries, but outmoded divisions of labour and discriminatory hiring practices are still the norm. There is a power imbalance that exists in the arts. Kelly Thornton, Artistic Director of Nightwood Theatre, was interviewed by CBC's *The Current* in January stating that women represent only 25% of the Artistic Directors in Canadian theatre, but that audiences were predominately female.² Thornton argues that women need to take up much more space, as theatre directors and artists, in order to open the pathways to leadership positions at major institutions.³ The reticence of promoting female leaders has been seen in other art forms too. For example, this winter in Montreal, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens received a petition signed by more than 3000 people objecting to its 2019 mixed program, at the time entitled Femmes, choreographed by three men. Les Grands Ballets Canadiens responded to the petition by changing the name of the program and meeting with director/choreographer Kathleen Rea, who began the petition.⁴ This is just one recent example of the issues that exist within the arts community, the timely need for change, and how arts organizations can proactively admit assumptions and inequities and work together toward resolution.

Additionally, equity and intersectionality are significant concerns in the arts sector. Women, especially marginalized women, are much more likely to have precarious contract positions and less likely to be in full-time stable positions of leadership; this inequity is further compounded for women who are also Indigenous, racialized, seniors, disabled, and so on.

The barriers to women working in positions of leadership are many. A 2014 Harvard University study suggests that women's difficulties advancing their careers and increasing their paycheques is "caused primarily by discrimination rather than by barriers traditionally believed to hold women back, such as lack of access to affordable childcare and elder care and inflexible work schedules."⁵ Women did not opt out of their careers due to family obligations; rather, employers believed that women valued their careers less, which resulted in discriminatory hiring practices. Barriers in the arts are not that different from barriers in other industries, including unconscious bias, discrimination, lack of access to training or mentorship, and/or lack of sponsorship. Therefore, encouraging existing leaders in the arts to accept anti-bias and anti-oppression training, as a first step, is part of the solution.

¹ MacArthur, Michelle. "Achieving Equity in Canadian Theatre: A Report with Best Practice Recommendations." April 2015. PGC, 27. <http://www.eit.playwrightsguild.ca/sites/eit.playwrightsguild.ca/files/FINAL%20EIT%20Report_4%2022%2015.pdf>.

² Based on data from Equity in Theatre cited by Thornton, www.equityintheatre.com.

³ <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-january-09-2018-1.4478144/women-need-to-take-up-more-space-feminist-theatre-calls-on-industry-to-hire-female-directors-1.4478158>

⁴ <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/theatre-and-performance/choreographer-quits-les-grands-ballets-male-dominated-femmes-program/article38246688/>

⁵ Quoted in MacArthur, 28 – 29.

Recommendation

Make anti-bias and anti-oppression training available to Boards of Directors by continuing to fund the Respectful Workplaces program at the Cultural Human Resources Council past 2020

Data Demonstrating the Problem

Here are some of the most current statistics from several artistic disciplines. In some cases, this data is more than five years old, which speaks to the need for more Canadian focused research. As Members of Parliament, you will have heard similar data in several other sectors. But there are two reasons why the lack of women in leadership positions is problem. First, the arts sector is public-facing, we have significant social influence on the issue of gender parity. Second, audiences are in decline⁶ perhaps because they do not see themselves in the artwork presented. For this reason, the arts sector and relevant policy supports must change now to allow for an adequate and timely systemic shift.

In Canadian Music, the organization Women in Music Canada's 2014 Industry Survey found that only 10% of women held executive positions.⁷ In visual arts, we see very different leadership depending on the size of the gallery: directors and curators of galleries are 70% women and 30% men (almost 92% Caucasian), but the bigger the gallery, the fewer the number of women in leadership positions.⁸ Next, women form the vast majority of dancers at 84% – so perhaps it is not surprising that dance is one of the poorest paid of all the arts occupations⁹ – but men are still prioritized as Artistic Directors and choreographers. We also see women disadvantaged in the world of Canadian literature. Studies show “an undeniable gender bias that overwhelmingly favour[s] male authors,” as evidenced by reviewing practices: only 30% of the books reviewed by male critics were written by women, which means women's books are “less likely to sell well and less likely to be considered for major awards,” and that leads to greater economic disadvantage.¹⁰ In the Deaf, Mad, and Disability Arts domain, 100% of the contributors that produce Deaf Art, Mad Art and/or Disability-identified Art work are female-led organizations, yet these arts organizations are significantly under-funded.¹¹ Of course, this data is not surprising to any woman who has worked in the arts in Canada.

Although there is clearly a wealth of data in the field, the sector needs a comprehensive picture of the role of women in the arts, where unconscious bias exists, and where to make change.

Recommendation

Instruct the Department of Canadian Heritage to conduct a literature review on gender parity in the arts in Canada, with attention to Artistic Directors and Boards of Directors. Encourage DCH to work with the Ontario Arts Council who is currently undertaking a literature review in Ontario.

⁶ From the [Arts and Heritage Access and Availability Survey](#): CAPACOA noted that compared to the 2012 survey, Canadians remained loyal to most types of facilities, except two: **reported attendance at performing arts facilities is down from 71% to 60%** and reported attendance at community or cultural centres is down 53% to 43%. Capacoa.ca

⁷ Women in Music. “A Profile of Women Working in Ontario's Music Industry.” May 2015. <<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58794b1fd2b8570fc2d4e7de/t/58910c50414fb590145b40b4/1485900882521/A+Profile+of+Wom+en+Working+in+the+ON+Music+Industry.pdf>>

⁸ Maranda, Michael. “Hard Numbers: A Study on Diversity in Canada's Galleries.” *Canadian Art*. April 5, 2017.

⁹ Canada Council for the Arts (CCA). “Towards an Understanding of the Breadth and Depth of Dance Activity in Canada.” Canada Dance Mapping Study. 2011.

¹⁰ The CanLit Guides Editorial Team. “CWILA and Literary Representation” *CanLit Guides*. 2012. Revised 2016. <<http://canlitguides.ca/canlit-guides-editorial-team/feminist-history-of-literature-and-culture-in-canada/cwila-and-literary-representation/>>.

¹¹ The Disability Arts and Culture Alliance of Canada. “Gender & Disability in Canada's Deaf, Mad and Disability Art Domain.” One-page Handout. 2015.

The Role of Boards of Directors in the Power Imbalance

Since August 2017 after the publication of Bob Ramsay's second article in the *Toronto Star* about the predominant white and male Boards of Directors at Toronto's legacy institutions,¹² the community has been quietly talking about leadership. Ramsay's article is corroborated by the Annual Report Card by the Canadian Board Diversity Council, which indicates that of the Arts, organizations surveyed, the Boards were 74.5% male and 25.5% female.¹³

There is a wealth of data from the Conference Board of Canada that demonstrates that female and diverse leaders enhance innovation, strengthen cohesion, and augment social capital. In March, the President of FedEx's Express Canada, Lisa Lisson wrote an opinion piece for CBC, stating, "We know that boards with women on them outperform their rivals, deliver higher returns, and are more aggressive about taking initiative."¹⁴ Many organizations, such as Across the Board and DiverseCity OnBoard, agree it is good business practice to have diverse Boards.

Notably, the House of Commons and the Senate recently passed Bill C-25. The Bill includes the provision that, "Directors of a prescribed corporation shall place before the shareholders, at every annual meeting, the prescribed information respecting diversity among the directors and among the members of senior management." Unfortunately, this provision does not apply to Not for Profits organizations, which are included in the legislation but not in this provision specifically. Although primarily emblematic, requiring Not for Profits to comply with this provision could be an important first step.

Recommendation

Instruct Corporations Canada to find a regulatory mechanism to require all registered Not-for-Profit organizations to comply with the expectation of diversity in Bill C-25.

Board composition is a complex issue and only one piece of the puzzle. Boards are made up of volunteers, who can be difficult to find, especially in less populated areas. But publicly funded organizations have a responsibility to reflect Canadian society. Volunteer fatigue is recognized as a problem in the sector, particularly among Indigenous, disabled, and racialized communities. Volunteering for a Board of Directors takes time and labour. Often women turn down the opportunity to participate on Boards because it is financially unfeasible to volunteer. Therefore, this recommendation is challenging but pivotal.

Recommendation

Recommend that Revenue Canada permit charities to change their by-laws to offer an honorarium to marginalized (i.e. Indigenous, Disabled, Racialized) Board members for their volunteer work.

Finding a way to compensate for lost income could increase the marginalized volunteer pool in the arts sector.

Response to Question from MP Anju Dhillon¹⁵

If we only address the lack of women in leadership positions, we are missing half of the conversation. Marginalized voices, such as Indigenous, disabled, and racialized folks, struggle to be heard in the arts.

¹² Ramsay, Bob. "Arts Boards still don't represent Toronto's diversity," *Toronto Star*, August 9, 2017, www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2017/08/09/arts-boards-still-dont-represent-torontos-diversity.html

¹³ CBDC Annual Report Card 2016, p. 8. www.boarddiversity.ca/report_card

¹⁴ Lisa Lisson, "Enough with the talk about getting more women on boards. Here's how to actually do it," (Opinion) CBC, www.cbc.ca/news/opinion/women-on-boards-1.4566959

¹⁵ MP Dhillon asked a question at the end of the session and there was not time to respond.

Leaders from equity-seeking groups provide a much needed perspective in the arts sector; therefore, an intersectional approach is vital.

Nina Lee Aquino, Artistic Director of Factory Theatre, passionately argues that, “Diverse stories present diverse solutions; imaginative ways of telling stories unlock answers to seemingly impossible questions, can lead to innovative ways of solving problems, infinite new perspectives and a renewed capacity to dream bigger than we have before.”¹⁶ More diversity can help to address the power imbalance felt within the arts sector.

Response to Question from MP Pierre Nantel¹⁷

Practically, leadership and authority must be shared between staff and Board members for Not for Profit organizations to operate successfully. When a Board micro-manages staff, or staff members mislead a Board, the arts organization begins to drift from its mandate. Ideally, varied expertise, network, and competencies (especially knowledge of human resources policies) are vital for success. Checks and balances must be in place, structurally, to ensure that no one leader can take a publicly funded organization astray.

Additionally, in the past two years, journalists, such as Kate Taylor of the *Globe and Mail*,¹⁸ have publicly noted the abundance of men in positions of power and the lack of women and equity-seeking people in leadership positions. The arts community is concerned by this trend and is talking about the role played by executive search firms in finding candidates for these senior leadership positions. The Canadian Arts Coalition is part of these conversations. Julia Ouellette of MOCA presented some excellent best practises when working with a search firm, such as taking as much time as needed to find leaders, and directing the search firm to find candidates that represent the arts organization’s values.

Conclusion

The Canadian Arts Coalition wants to recognize the good policy work that has already started. The Canada Council for the Arts has been working on Board and workforce composition for two years now. The results of the Canada Council’s new pilot survey on Board and staff diversity will be critical within the arts sector.

To conclude, the Canadian Arts Coalition wants to thank the members of the Standing Committee for your boldness in addressing the sensitive topic of leadership in the arts. Together, we can build a better more respectful arts sector for our daughters, and in turn, for all Canadians.

¹⁶ Nina Lee Aquino, World Theatre Day statement 2018, pact.ca/services-support/the-case-for-theatre/world-theatre-day/

¹⁷ MP Nantel asked a question but there was not time to respond.

¹⁸ Kate Taylor, “The Outsiders Who Got In,” *Globe and Mail*, Feb. 2, 2018, www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/the-outsiders-who-got-in-why-sought-after-arts-positions-in-the-country-are-going-tonon-canadians/article37798627/