


BC INDIGENOUS ARTS HUB

Proposal Outline

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Introduction

During my October 31, 2018 presentation to the Parliamentary Committee reviewing the Copyright Act, I recommended support for a National Indigenous Arts Advocacy and Service organization.

I realize this is an enormous undertaking, and respectfully submit a proposal that I believe will ultimately enable the establishment of such an organization, by first building community-based organizations involving 34 Indigenous language, arts and culture communities within BC. I have provided excerpts from four important BC studies that will speak further to the choice to pilot an initiative for Indigenous community based arts organizations in BC.

This proposal seeks to begin the process of rebuilding, revitalizing and restoring each community's traditions, disciplines, practices, organizational structures, systems, protocols and laws. It seeks to build a framework, strategies and implementation actions that will enable Indigenous artists to be supported as they actively pursue their respective artistic, cultural, entrepreneurial and business goals. And the project will create public education and awareness curriculum and learning materials that will enable citizens, corporations and businesses to understand the unique histories of Indigenous arts, artists, copyright, intellectual properties and traditional knowledge.

Proposal

The BC Indigenous Arts Hub (IAH, *working name/title*) is a proposed network of Indigenous Arts professionals with the skills, expertise and experience to support Indigenous artists and communities in the process of rebuilding, revitalizing and restoring their respective arts traditions, disciplines, practices, organizational structures, systems, protocols and laws.

The initial network is comprised of ten Indigenous arts professionals who have been working with Indigenous artists and communities over the past thirty years. The IAH envisions a provincial network of Indigenous Arts professionals to work directly with Indigenous artists and communities within each region of the province on matters such as:

- grant writing
- portfolio development
- preparing for community arts festivals and gatherings
- project management
- art as a business
- understanding protocols in arts and culture
- understanding and negotiating contracts such as licensing agreements
- keeping informed about opportunities for artists (i.e., residencies, peer assessment committees, speaking opportunities, exhibits, collaborations, Calls for Proposals)
- creating practical work and exhibit spaces for artists, including access to tools and equipment

These are just some of the types of supports and services that Indigenous artists and communities in BC have sought consistently over the past thirty years.

As one of its first priorities, the initial members of the IAH will coordinate a series of four ‘think tank’ sessions to discuss and consider various formal organizational structures within which to carry out its mandate; sample options include:

- professional collective
- professional association
- charitable, not-for-profit society
- provincial or federal department/unit
- not-for-profit society
- business entity
- cooperative association
- government secretariat

Other priority topics for the think-tank sessions will include:

- Capacity building, professional development and accredited training in arts management. For example, developing and delivering a training program for a cohort of 16-20 community arts facilitators from around the province, to build a network of knowledge, expertise and community of practice.
- Establishing a formal entity through which to coordinate Indigenous artists’ input for legislation, policy, programs and industry standards that impact Indigenous artists.
- Developing public education and awareness curriculum and learning materials about Indigenous arts, artists, copyright, intellectual properties and traditional knowledge.

The results of these think-tank sessions will be direction and guidance that will inform and shape the broader framework, and finalize implementation steps with corresponding budgets.

Background

Aboriginal artists and their organizations received little funding from the Canadian art system until after the 1960s. The excellence of their art forms was not recognized nor was sufficient support provided to build appropriate infrastructure.¹

There are only a handful of studies and reports that speak to the concerns of Indigenous artists and offer practical recommendations or solutions to longstanding issues. For instance, the **1994 Aboriginal Artists Project Report**² states that:

Artists agreed there is a need for some sort of organization that would:

- Assist artists in networking on local, provincial, national and international levels;
- Promote greater Aboriginal control over the sector;
- Educate consumers about Aboriginal arts and crafts;
- Encourage the development of strong legislation to protect art produced by Native people and provide assistance in the areas of trademarks and copyrights;
- Act as an information clearing house and referral service to facilitate access to training, raw materials, wholesale supplies, working space, financing, and markets

¹ Ibid, 2001

² Aboriginal Artists Project Report, BC Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture, 1994.

The 2005 Legacy, Transition, Succession: Supporting the Past and Future of Canada's Arts Organizations found that:

Canada's arts organizations are already seriously underfunded and under resourced for carrying out their regular programming. They will require additional financial and human resources to conduct legacy preservation.

It is recommended that the Council work with the Department of Canadian Heritage and Library and Archives Canada in seeking financial resources to fund arts organizations to preserve their legacy.

The 2010 Preliminary Study of the Aboriginal-themed Gift Market in Major Vancouver Tourism Sites, stated there was a need for:

- Establishing standards, in particular for fair compensation of artist work
- Providing business training and other support for artists new to the market
- Raising awareness among retailers, businesses, and consumers
- Enhancing the promotion and recognisability of Aboriginal-made products

In the 2014 the First Peoples' Cultural Council hosted the Cultural Protocol & the Arts Forum, which involved over 70 artists and arts professionals from around BC, the following recommendation were made:

To support the learning and application of cultural protocols amongst artists, the following recommendations and suggested resources were brought forward:

- An organization or advocacy group that encourages and supports the various artistic disciplines in better understanding and knowing cultural protocols. One participant recommended starting with appropriate existing organizations and suggested more collaboration with FPCC.
- Opportunities, regionally, provincially and nationally, for more dialogue among artists, arts professionals and cultural people who are actively involved in supporting or presenting Aboriginal art. Many participants stressed the importance of continued discussion about protocols, protection of Indigenous cultural knowledge, and the building of our identities.
- More workshops at the local and community levels. Ongoing interaction with fellow artists, Elders and cultural knowledge keepers would enable both emerging and practicing artists the opportunity to learn, network and share experiences that could contribute to strengthened vision.

In addition to these studies and reports, and as was noted during the recent Parliamentary Committee on the review of the Copyright Act, there was an interest in, (and indeed a need for) input from Indigenous communities, but the lack of Indigenous arts organizational infrastructure locally, regionally, provincially or nationally significantly limited the scope of Indigenous participation and voice in these discussions.

Realities of the Indigenous-themed art product market

In BC, the sale of Indigenous-themed giftware and souvenirs is a thriving market for non-Indigenous producers (i.e., private businesses and companies), but not for the Indigenous artists whose unique work is used to drive this market. For example, a 2010 study of the major tourism sites in Vancouver, BC, found that:

The vast majority of the miscellaneous small items (88%) are produced by companies with no Aboriginal participation at all.³

Appropriations, forgeries and theft of Indigenous art have been going on since there was a market for Indigenous art beginning in the 1800's. In that era, most Indigenous artworks were considered 'artifacts' or 'curios' of a dead or dying people and culture, sparking the belief that Indigenous art was in the public realm and therefore free for the taking.

While these perspectives began to shift in the post-war era between the 1940's and 1960's, remnants of these outdated notions have continued to today in the form of copyright infringement on original Indigenous artworks i.e., original designs being replicated for mass production without permission from the artist or compensation paid to the artist.

Some Indigenous artists have entered into licensing agreements with producers of mass-manufactured goods, but few get to negotiate royalty rates, which are often dictated by the producer.

On average, for products occupying three quarters of the display space (those with minimal or no Aboriginal participation) presented for sale in major Vancouver tourism sites, between 0% and 5% of wholesale price goes to Aboriginal individuals and companies (payment for design work).⁴

Discussion

While existing arts funding programs through the Canada Council for the Arts, the BC Arts Council and the First Peoples' Culture Council Arts Department provide project-based support for emerging and professional arts organizations, there remains a need for a longer-term, multifaceted, multi-year approach to addressing the most urgent needs of Indigenous artists throughout BC.

The development of the IAH is proposed as a **three-year pilot initiative** that will enable the informed structuring of the community based organizations needed to create real change. It can also serve a model for other provinces and territories in Canada to consider. IAH's initial goals are to:

- Train a cohort of 16-20 community arts managers and administrators from Indigenous communities throughout the province (see Appendix A for more info). Members of this cohort will provide full time, locally based arts support services to the communities in their respective territories.

³ Preliminary Study of the Aboriginal-themed Giftware Market in Major Vancouver Tourism Sites, p.13 2010.

⁴ Preliminary Study of the Aboriginal-themed Giftware Market in Major Vancouver Tourism Sites, Highlights, 2010.

- Provide direct supports to Indigenous artists, communities and Nations in rebuilding their respective traditional arts and culture organizational infrastructures that were dismantled by way of government legislation, policy and practice.
- Begin to coordinate and address, based on the laws of each respective Nation, responses to questions around copyright, intellectual properties, traditional knowledge, and other important issues.
- Enable meaningful dialogue, input and feedback from Indigenous artists around the province, on matters that impact them directly (i.e., legislative, policy, program, industry, surveys and data about Indigenous arts and artists).
- Help to and create learning opportunities for the public, businesses and governments around the practices and laws related to Indigenous arts; copyright and intellectual property practices; and the protocols around traditional knowledge.

Members of the committee, I ask for your support in sharing this proposal with the federal departments that have responsibilities and mandates in trade and small business development; arts policy, programs and funding; training and employment; and legislation that impacts Indigenous citizens. I look forward to any feedback you may offer.

Gilakas'la

Thank you for the opportunity to share this submission.

Budget Considerations (3 yrs)

- Core Project Team (12 Fees, Travel, Office Space)
- Communications hub
- Four Think-Tank Sessions
- Project Planning sessions
- Development & delivery of training program
- Indigenous Arts Facilitators (16-20)

Appendix A - Indigenous Arts Facilitators (16)

A cohort of 16 Indigenous arts coordinators that will train together for six months using a blended-learning approach that will include:

- Six four-day in-residence sessions
- Six video-conference sessions
- Individual projects
- One five-day in-residence session at end of six months

The training series will prepare Indigenous Arts Facilitators to:

- Deliver a series of arts workshops with topics and content to be determined by the feedback of Indigenous artists. For public information sessions, topics and content will also be guided by public feedback.
- Provide individual support to artists in portfolio development (CV/arts resume, photos, audio samples, film/video samples, artist biography, artist statement); grant writing; project development and management; reporting).
- Assist local and regional organizations in community arts mapping and planning; developing strategies and identifying priorities; developing action plans.
- Assist local and regional organizations to build their respective declarations/manifestos, vision, mission & mandate statements; plus goals, objectives, actions & timelines.
- Assist in public awareness and education about Indigenous arts.
- Work with fellow Regional Arts Facilitators in carrying out research, conducting surveys, and hosting focus groups and/or community gatherings for community feedback and input.

