

Aboriginal Curatorial Collective
Collectif des commissaires autochtones

A Brief to the House of Commons
Standing Committee on Finance

August 2020

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

That the government implement Accessible Funding for Sustainable Equity in the Arts to support Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour artists and arts professionals financially and culturally.

Recommendation 2

Make funds available in a non-hierarchical format that supports artists and cultural workers in areas that are outside of current funding models.

Recommendation 3

That the government provides funding in the amount of \$ 15,000,000 over 3 years for the Equity in the Arts program.

Recommendation 4

That through this program, the government works with community-based organizations to distribute this funding to community members in partnership with the Canada Council for the Arts.

ABOUT THE ABORIGINAL CURATORIAL COLLECTIVE

The Aboriginal Curatorial Collective / Collectif des commissaires autochtones (ACC-CCA) is an Indigenous run and led non-profit organization that aims to support and connect fellow Indigenous curators, artists, writers, academics, and professionals through various methods of gathering. Since our incorporation in 2006, the ACC-CCA has continued to engage in critical discourses, increase professional opportunities for our members, develop programming, and most importantly work to build reciprocal relationships with Indigenous curators, artists, communities and the institutions we engage with.

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout the first half of 2020, the ACC-CCA undertook responsibility to financially support Indigenous artists, curators, and creatives who lost contracts due to COVID-19 closing down art spaces across the country. We began this work because we could not imagine anything else that was more important than financially supporting our expansive community of Indigenous arts professionals at a time they most needed help.

We began a program called *Curating Care* where we asked Indigenous artists to submit 2-minute videos explaining who they are, what they do, and how they integrate care into their practice. Upon submitting this video, the 41 participants received \$250 and their words contributed to an archive that will mark a time of pain and sadness with traces of care and hope for the future. After we depleted our small amount of funding for *Curating Care*, we were asked by the Canada Council for the Arts if we could do something similar on a much larger scale. We were given \$250,000 to distribute to artists in the amount of \$1,000 per person and only required applicants to fill out a very simple form which they could send in by email, through an online form, or that we would fill out over the phone for them to provide the best possible support. *Community Cares* was announced on June 30, 2020 and by July 7, 2020 we had to close the program after having received over 500 applications. The Canada Council for the Arts was able to increase the amount that we were able to give out to \$450,000, but this left

out many people who still need support. To give further context to the speed at which people applied, within less than 24 hours we had already surpassed our limit of 250 applicants.

This fund was distributed and managed by the ACC-CCA. Our staff spoke to each person who applied to *Community Cares* to complete their applications. It was an immensely time-consuming process, but we learned a huge amount from every conversation, the most important takeaways being:

- 1 People thought we were a scam because they had never seen anything like this and thought it was "too good to be true";
- 2 People who often don't or can't apply to arts funding relayed that they were amazed that a support program finally felt as though it was designed for them; and
- 3 Every person mentioned something about how they wished something like this would exist on an ongoing basis.

COVID-19 disproportionately affects Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) across the globe. As an Indigenous run and led organization we saw members in our own communities terrified that thousands of years of knowledge could be erased due to the virus' targeting of elders. We also saw how this pandemic divided racially marginalized communities to those with more privilege through accessibility to financial stability and multiple venues of support. These issues are not new for us, but a disease that required individuals to react selflessly to ensure that they did not spread the disease to someone who might be more susceptible, showed how divided we are as a society and it amplified racial tensions that many forget or choose to ignore.

There have been countless studies showing how BIPOC artists are more affected by financial instability and have less access to professional opportunities. Some of the main issues we face are as follows:

- 1 We often represent less than 5% of the artists that commercial galleries show;
- 2 We are often the last hired in arts institutions and we are often delegated to only curating or exhibiting that "type" of art (that "type" in this case being "Indigenous art");
- 3 We make significantly less income than our non-racialized counterparts in all aspects of the arts;
- 4 When we are hired, we are more often than not the only one and are required to do the reconciliation work of an entire white institution;
- 5 While our physicality is deeply under included, it is often more than 50% of content that white institutions show relies on the work of BIPOC peoples.

The effects of this pandemic are going to linger and affect marginalized communities for much longer than many have predicted. What we have seen and heard from our communities is that there are not enough avenues for BIPOC

artists and arts professionals to receive financial support outside of relying on white institutions. We want to be able to provide an avenue for those in our community to feel supported from *within* our own communities.

We believe that artists and curators can imagine and create narratives for a future based in equity, sustainability, creativity, and care while also greatly helping in bolstering the Canadian economy. We also believe that BIPOC arts professionals need more opportunities for accessing simple funding that requires only small amounts of labour outside of the decolonial labour we already need to do on a daily basis, which we receive little to no financial compensation for.

We are recommending that the federal government provide funding in the amount of \$15,000,000 over 3 years in order to provide accessible financial support for BIPOC professionals working in the arts. This funding would be distributed in various amounts based on project type: Artist Support; Materials Support; Project Support; and Community Activism.

We believe that the best way to distribute these funds is through BIPOC led arts organizations who often feel more accessible than a major funding body for independent artists and professionals. Finally, we think that it would be best that these funds be implemented in partnership with the Canada Council for the Arts. With the creation of the Creating, Knowing, Sharing program, Indigenous artists have felt significantly more comfortable applying to funding as it feels more like a space invested in supporting them. From the conversations that we have had with our vast and immediate communities, Indigenous curators and artists working in Canada, we know that more avenues for simple and accessible funding directed towards these communities would not only help to reach wider networks, but would greatly enhance the cultural capacities and strength of this country.

We would be eager to present our recommendations to the standing committee should we be invited to do so.

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