



Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance
of the Upcoming 2021 Federal Budget

By: Sistema Toronto

Recommendations:

1. That the government invest in community-based music programs for children in vulnerable communities to ensure the future of a diverse, equitable and inclusive arts and music community representative of all Canadians
2. That the government recognize that as a result of COVID-19, community music programs like Sistema Toronto play a unique role in the continued employment of many musicians across Canada while live performances are either not possible or only tentatively scheduled for the foreseeable future. Investment in community-based music programs that employ professional musicians will help contribute to the Canadian economy through employment and spending as it recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

Founded in 2011, Sistema Toronto provides free musical and intellectual opportunities to children ages 6-14+ in vulnerable communities, with the goal of transformative social change. Our program is located in Toronto neighbourhoods with some of the highest child poverty rates across the city, including Parkdale, Jane/Finch and East Scarborough. Over 90% of the children and families served by our organization identify as Black, Indigenous and people of colour.

Sistema Toronto is first and foremost a social development program, using ensemble-based music to transform the lives of children from vulnerable communities. Our participants work together for 10 hours each week where they learn strings (violin, viola, cello, or double bass), percussion, choir and Music & Movement while developing important life skills like problem solving, empathy, and self-advocacy. Children remain in our core program for up to 8 years, and graduate as well-rounded and talented musicians and leaders in their communities. Our graduates attend prestigious and competitive high school programs including specialized music high schools, International Baccalaureate programs and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programs.

Sistema Toronto builds stronger communities by enabling children from marginalized neighbourhoods to overcome poverty, grow, and thrive as engaged citizens and future leaders.

THE ARTS AND CULTURE CHARITY SECTOR

Charities in the Arts and Culture sector have experienced or expect to experience a significant decrease in revenue as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many charities rely on a variety of donation streams for revenue, including government grants, corporate giving, foundation and individual donations as well in-person events. Short term emergency government benefits and grants have helped but with the slowdown of the Canadian economy and anticipated recession, many donors have already or are planning to scale back on donations for the second half of 2020 and into 2021. As COVID-19 and physical distancing measures are expected to last at least through 2021, charities are unable to host in-person fundraising events for the foreseeable future. As a result, Sistema Toronto is expecting a 20-40% drop in revenue for its 2021 fiscal year without further support through Canadian federal granting streams for community-based music programs aimed at children.

Support from the Canadian Government for community-based music programs that serve low income BIPOC communities will help these communities emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and aid in restarting the Canadian economy as Canada emerges from COVID-19.

RECOMMENDATION #1

That the government invest in community-based music programs for children in vulnerable communities to ensure the future of a diverse, equitable and inclusive arts and music community representative of all Canadians.

RATIONAL FOR RECOMMENDATION #1

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the inequalities that exist in Toronto along economic and racial lines. According to data compiled by Toronto Public Health, people of colour in low income communities have been hardest hit by the pandemic, with 83% of all cases diagnosed, yet these communities only make up 52% of Toronto's total population.¹ Sistema Toronto's program is located in three of these neighbourhoods, which also have some of the highest child poverty rates across the city.

The Toronto Foundation's 2019 Vital Signs Report notes a strong correlation between racial and low income neighbourhoods across Toronto even before the COVID-19 pandemic. Children from Black communities in particular in these neighbourhoods are also less likely to graduate high school than those from more affluent and white families, and are less likely to have access to after-school programs, including music and the arts.² A 2019 study of high school students in British Columbia found that youth who study music are more likely to score higher in reading, writing and mathematics than those who do not study music, regardless of socioeconomic background.³

There is also a strong correlation between student success and role models who look like them with similar lived experiences. Without widespread access to equitable community music programs, there is little opportunity for children and youth in BIPOC communities to work towards a career in music. Canadian government funding for the arts should be made available to community programs that work with low income and BIPOC communities rather than only professional musicians.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATION #1

How investment from the Canadian government in community-based music programs for children and youth will help restart the Canadian economy as it recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic:

1. Access to free childcare, directly helping low income and BIPOC communities that have been hardest hit by COVID-19: Programs like Sistema Toronto that run after school provide low income families with child care at no cost, which provides immediate economic relief for families.
2. Access to community music programs for children in vulnerable communities can help level the academic playing field for low income and BIPOC populations that experience systemic racism, which keeps these communities in a cycle of generational poverty. When addressed with other opportunities aimed at overcoming systemic racism, this can

¹ <https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-latest-city-of-toronto-news/covid-19-status-of-cases-in-toronto/>

² Toronto Foundation 2019 Vital Signs Report, p 60.

³ Martin Guhn, Scott D. Dmerson and Peter Gouzouasis, "A Population-Level Analysis of Associations Between School Music Participation and Academic Achievement," *Journal of Educational Psychology*. 2020. Vol. 112, no. 2, 308-328

help BIPOC populations break the cycle of poverty that exists in many of these communities.

3. Equitable accessibility to music and the arts for children in BIPOC communities coupled with investment in BIPOC artists will ensure a diverse, equitable and inclusive music community representative of all Canadians.

RECOMMENDATION #2

That the government recognize that as a result of COVID-19, community music programs like Sistema Toronto play a unique role in the continued employment of many musicians across Canada as live performances are either not possible or only tentatively scheduled for the foreseeable future. Investment in community-based music programs that employ professional musicians will help contribute to the Canadian economy as it recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

RATIONAL FOR RECOMMENDATION #2

Sistema Toronto employs 35 professional musicians. While the Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy has been useful for ensuring continued employment, live performances where many musicians generate their income will still not be an option or will be limited even as the Canadian economy emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic. Without access to concerts and live performances into 2021, many musicians will no longer have access to their main source of income.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATION #2

1. Community programs like Sistema Toronto that employ professional musicians to run programs have the ability to play a significant role in the job market and employment of professional musicians within the arts and culture sector.
2. Government support for community-based music programs will directly help maintain jobs, consumer spending and tax revenue for the Canadian government, as Canada's economy is restarted and recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

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