

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

By

**Visual Arts Alliance**  
**Alliance pour les arts Visuels**  
**VAA-AAV**

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## **Summary of Recommendations**

1. That the government implement a Basic Income Guarantee, building on the experience of CERB and expanding it into a holistic, long-term safeguard of decent living conditions for all persons living in Canada.
2. That the government extend the Canada Emergency Response Benefit while the Covid-19 pandemic and resultant economic crisis persist, and until such time as a universal basic income guarantee is in place.
3. That the government dedicate substantial and recurrent funding to artists, cultural leaders, and organizations identifying as Indigenous, Black, racialized, and other equity-seeking groups.
4. That the government intensify its efforts to collect sales tax and income tax from multinational corporations conducting business in Canada and consider a 3% digital services tax.

## About the Visual Arts Alliance - Alliance pour les arts visuels

The Visual Arts Alliance (VAA-AAV) is a consortium of national visual, media, and craft arts service organizations comprised of artists, curators, art museums and public art galleries, artist-run centres, and educators, which has been working together since 2007 to advance the visual arts.

The VAA-AAV includes representation from the following national organizations:

- Aboriginal Curatorial Collective / Collectif des conservateurs autochtones (ACC / CCA)
- Artist-Run Centres and Collectives Conference / Conférence des collectifs et des centres d'artistes autogérés (ARCCC / CCCAA aka ARCA)
- L'Association des groupes en arts visuels francophones (AGAVF)
- Canadian Art Gallery Educators (CAGE)
- Canadian Art Museum Directors Organization / Organisation des directeurs des musées d'art canadiens (CAMDO-ODMAC)
- Canadian Artists' Representation / Le Front des artistes canadiens (CARFAC)
- Canadian Crafts Federation / Fédération canadienne des métiers d'art (CCF / FCMA)
- Canadian Museums Association / Association des musées canadiens (CMA / AMC)
- Independent Media Arts Alliance / Alliance des arts médiatiques indépendants (IMAA / AAMI)
- Royal Canadian Academy of Arts / Académie royale des arts du Canada (RCA / ARC)

The VAA-AAV's is a communication network of associations representing the interests of the visual arts sector in Canada. Representatives for each organization attend regular meetings and maintain an ongoing dialogue with one another, functioning as a forum for discussion and action to advance the visual arts in Canada.

With a united voice, we advocate for the advancement of the visual arts sector by:

- engaging public appreciation for, and connection with, visual arts in all their forms;
- providing stronger and stable support to artists and to the individuals and institutions that present, preserve and interpret the work they create;
- increasing investment in arts education for all ages and from all levels of government;
- providing dedicated support for Indigenous arts; and
- recognizing and supporting the leading role of visual arts in strengthening Canada's international profile.

## Rationale for Recommendations

The precarious nature of labour for artists in the visual arts, independent media art and contemporary craft communities long predates the crisis brought on by the current pandemic. As 2020 Governor General's Visual and Media Arts Award laureate Zainub Verjee has written, "Today, the world of labour looks a lot like the way art labour has looked for decades."<sup>1</sup> Independent artists have long survived on a patchwork of income sources, constantly vulnerable to the vagaries of economic downturns.

In spring 2020, CERB was rolled out and important revisions were announced shortly thereafter allowing recipients to continue to draw small amounts of supplemental income. Many professional self-employed artists who were fortunate enough to qualify for CERB reported that this period may represent the most stable stretch of income in their entire professional careers. The measure allowed many artists to remain productive and share their art for public enjoyment thanks to the basic protection of an unprecedented social safety net.

During this period, the community-led support group and participatory research project [ilostmygig.ca](https://ilostmygig.ca) collected stories from artists negatively affected since the onset of the pandemic. Those professional artists who were able to qualify for CERB frequently described gratitude for this support. However they also expressed extremely high levels of stress and apprehension about their longer term prospects once CERB expires. In parallel, many artists lamented their ineligibility under CERB for reasons related to its non-universal nature, e.g. insufficient income last year, immigration status, or other exclusions.

Selection of impact stories reported to [ilostmygig.ca](https://ilostmygig.ca):

*"I have no idea how I'll cover my living expenses past the 4 months of CERB, let alone my ongoing operating expenses for my business."*

*"As an independent emerging artist, I only started publicly showing my work in late 2018, I am not eligible for the CERB because I made far less than \$5000 in 2019, and the last 12 months... I cannot afford to pay my bills."*

*"I have no work or income (aside from CERB) for the foreseeable future. I have had to lay my staff off, and am currently still trimming expenses, and shutting down the office."*

*"I will be completely reliant on CERB to pay the rent, my bills, and buy groceries as the months of this pandemic unfold."<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Georgia Straight, May 14, 2020.

<https://www.straight.com/news/zainub-verjee-covid-19-crisis-has-exposed-hypocrisy-about-artists-and-their-labour>

<sup>2</sup> <https://ilostmygig.ca/impact-stories/>

It is clear that the increasing prevalence of precarious, short-term and informal types of labour, not just in the art world but across our society, demands major cross-system revisions to Canada's social safety net. The Visual Arts Alliance believes that the federal government should set a goal of ensuring that all persons living in Canada be guaranteed a basic income, regardless of work status, income-tested not means-tested, in an amount which allows them to live a dignified, healthy, engaged life.

This will allow Canadians to weather future storms (pandemics, climate change, economic upheaval, technological disruptions) that force them out of one occupation and require them to retrain for another.

We recognize that an Income guarantee should not act as a disincentive to paid work, but also advocate for a holistic understanding of what constitutes productive work in our society. We note that many forms of essential work are consistently undervalued in today's economy. For example, many individuals who did not meet the \$5000 income threshold to qualify for CERB were in fact engaged in valuable and productive work which was simply unpaid.

The Visual Arts Alliance believes that CERB represents a positive first step towards a universal and holistic basic income guarantee. The federal government should build on this success by prolonging the period of CERB eligibility beyond its current time limit of 24 weeks. It should be extended until such time as the pandemic and its attendant economic disruptions are behind us or until a permanent successor to CERB is in place (**Recommendation 2**). Further, the government should draw on the recent experience of CERB to develop a long-term system of guaranteed income that meets the basic needs of all persons living in Canada, without exclusions, based on work status, immigration status or for any other reason (**Recommendation 1**). Developing a truly inclusive social safety net should be done in partnership with provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples. Partnerships are the only way to ensure that a holistic national program meets the needs of each jurisdiction, is cost effective, and upholds Indigenous rights and sovereignty.

The Visual Arts Alliance is apprehensive that recently announced plans to transition CERB recipients to a revamped Employment Insurance<sup>3</sup> will not be sufficiently inclusive to meet the basic needs of all unemployed and underemployed individuals in Canada, especially for those who fall between the cracks inherent in EI, and even in CERB. At the time of submitting this brief, the details of this proposed transition had not yet been announced; the VAA is therefore unable to comment specifically at this time. However,

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<sup>3</sup> CBC news, July 31, 2020

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/employment-insurance-cerb-contract-workers-pandemic-trudeau-1.5668961>

we would welcome the opportunity to appear before the Standing Committee to discuss our recommendations further.

In addition to the recommendations made above, The VAA endorses recommendations made by our peers in the arts community.

**Recommendation 3: We endorse the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective's Recommendations 1 and 3, CARFAC's Recommendation 2, and the Canadian Arts Coalition's Recommendation 2 that the government dedicate substantial and recurrent funding to artists, cultural leaders, and organizations identifying as Indigenous, Black, racialized, Deaf or disabled, and official language minorities.**

By instituting dedicated envelopes administered by the Canada Council and existing PCH programs, the relatively modest amounts being proposed by our peers will develop crucial infrastructure within marginalized communities who are woefully underserved by arts infrastructure at present, and also hardest hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. As the Canadian Arts Coalition's pre-budget brief notes, Indigenous and racialized artists are severely underrepresented in decision-making roles in the arts sector, they lag behind white artists in terms of income, and the organizations they lead have significantly lower and less stable funding than white-led organizations.<sup>4</sup>

**Recommendation 4: We endorse CAPACOA's Recommendation 5 and the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française's Recommendation 4, that the government intensify its efforts to collect sales tax and income tax from multinational corporations conducting business in Canada and consider a 3% digital services tax.**

Obliging multinationals to collect and remit GST/HST and to pay income tax on revenue earned in Canada would increase the government's revenue base and level the playing field for Canadian content providers. A 3% digital services tax, following France's model, would fill an existing gap in international agreements concerning digital transactions and underscore a commitment to fiscal justice as we recover from this devastating economic crisis.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://hillstrategies.com/resource/demographic-diversity-of-artists-in-canada-in-2016/>