

August 9, 2015



Attn: Simon Brault, Director, CEO
Canada Council for the Arts
150 Elgin St
P.O. Box 1047
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5V8
Canada

cc: Dipna Horra (CCA), Noel Habel (CCA), Steven Loft (CCA), Alan Shain (CCA)

Dear Colleagues:

The Ad Hoc Assembly (Artists Driving Holistic Organizational Change) has enjoyed support from CCA in pursuing equity for artists in Canada. AHA positions its work with equity-seeking communities, locating the distinct issues of Indigenous arts and artists with disabilities within the framework of cultural diversity. We work collaboratively with organizations to pursue sustainable change, and welcome the involvement of funders, community, nasos, artists, orgs, pdc's, academics, educators, festivals in our work.

AHA applauds and encourages Simon Brault's articulated commitment to implementing Canada Council's pervasive equity policy organization-wide. In light of this articulated priority combined with the desire for transparency around the transition, I am responding to your invitation for clients to contribute to the change.

While strategies for addressing inequity have, in the past, met with the response that there is "no appetite for it" among the Council's client companies, I remind you that we don't need an appetite for medicine, we only need a desire to heal. We have often heard that "the timing isn't right," but with the major changes in process, policy and philosophy being implemented at the Canada Council the timing is now ideal to implement equity changes. While many organizations feel they don't have access to the necessary expertise to make change, we are in the enviable position where our artistic community itself houses the experience and knowledge needed. While many organizations have the desire to effect change but don't know where to begin, we herein offer a number of practical proposals that will yield impactful results.

The following specific proposals are put forth for your consideration, as the beginning of a larger conversation about the participation of the Ad Hoc Assembly in shaping the new model.

Mandatory equity assessment for all operating clients. Clients of the Equity Office have been asked annually to provide statistics regarding the equity quantum of their staff, board and artists. This suggests the Council has mechanisms to quantify and analyze such data, mechanisms which can be expanded to incorporate statistic tracking of all of operating clients with regard to engagement of Indigenous artists, artists of colour, professional artists with disabilities and women. Rather than identifying only those organizations serving equity-seeking communities as mandate, this initiative would magnify the pervasiveness of the council's equity work across its client base – not through quota management, but by putting weight on equity and bringing it to front of mind. The administrative

burden added to client companies will be no more onerous than that willingly undertaken by the under-resourced clients of the Equity Office for the last ten years, and the outcomes will be of immeasurable value.

Juror internships. With peer assessment at the heart of the Council's assessment process, it is vital that all clients see their peers represented at the assessment level. A scarcity of 'qualified' jurors from equity seeking communities is challenging for jury composition and for diversity of perspective within a given community. AHA members have discussed a model for juror internship that would replenish the pool of assessors and build professional development into the process. This proposal would see the mentorship of an emerging artists from an equity seeking community by a formal peer assessor, including one day of auditing the process and follow-up for context.

Implementing these proposals will increase equity in peer assessments by broadening the pool of assessors for officers to draw from, ensuring it is possible, for example, to have an Indigenous artist on every panel, so that we don't have to discuss "how very important Indigenous arts are" in the glaring absence of an Indigenous colleague.

The presence of artists with disabilities at the table can be instrumental in relocating the discourse from therapeutic to professional disability arts.

The presence of interning artists at the table will enrich discussion with perspectives from nextgen artists, new practises and other areas of assessment which are considered but often not represented at the table.

This activity can inform national discourse and demystify the funding process, thus supporting the future success of these artists as applicants, and seeding the community with knowledge about the new model.

Across-the-board equity assessments will put the Canada Council at the forefront of centralizing equity issues. With this approach, artistic leadership across this country will not only be asked to collect and report data, but also to consider and act on it. The data these assessments will yield is of the kind that will benefit all, but that only the Canada Council has the reach and leverage to acquire.

Within the membership of the Ad Hoc Assembly we have extensive experience in equity work, and a willingness to share their knowledge. Change is hard, but we are a capable community. We are, as Mr. Brault has asserted many times, mature enough to do this. Change is happening across this country, and I hope that through these and other timely proposals AHA and CCA can partner to be drivers of this change.

I look forward to continuing this discussion with you.

Regards,



DM St. Bernard
Coordinator, Ad Hoc Assembly