intervene

York Region Arts Council:
Advocacy Action Plan

"Cultural planning offers an opportunity for communities to create a roadmap unique to their needs, aspirations and strengths. By planning strategically, local governments and arts groups can work together to integrate arts and culture more fully into their community."

- Honourable Stan Hagen, Minister of Tourism, Sport and the Arts (British Columbia)
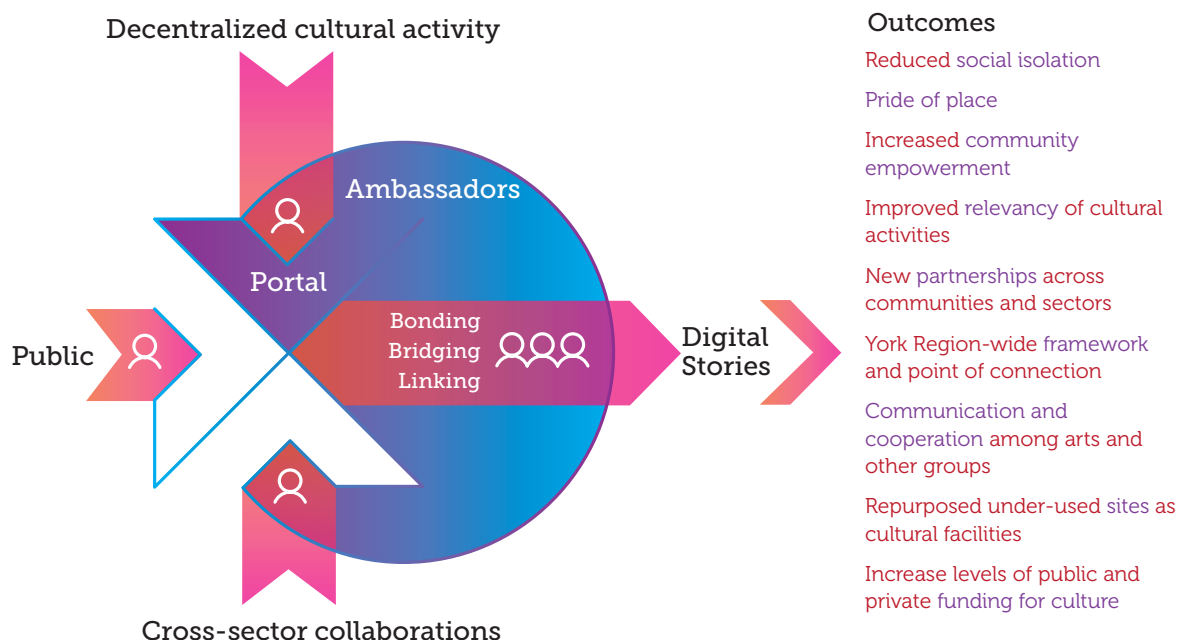
York Region Arts Council

Arts as Resiliency / Advocacy Action Plan

create resilience, creative resilience

In the months following the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, the city saw record-high levels of both new marriages and divorces. In fact, reports at the time described marriages being formalized without one party knowing the first name of their betrothed. During periods of uncertainty, our psychological need for certainty and closure becomes amplified. Those that feel somewhat pessimistic or isolated are likely to find themselves more deeply isolated and negative about the world. Those that are angry with systems and institutions are more likely to respond with anger. Those that are supported and connected are better able to support and connect with others.

In order to ameliorate the negative polarizing effects of uncertainty, trust becomes critical. Trust is a product of relationships within our communities, with other communities that we share space with, and with those in positions of power that make decisions about how to respond to sudden changes. Trust is elusive, particularly in a world defined by greater material complexity – in things we can buy, content we can consume, meals we can enjoy – but reduced social complexity. Our circle of relations shrinks, our fences grow higher, and we have fewer people to turn to when things get hard.

Decentralized cultural activity

Ambassadors

Portal

Public

Bonding
Bridging
Linking

Digital
Stories

Cross-sector collaborations

Outcomes

Reduced social isolation

Pride of place

Increased community empowerment

Improved relevancy of cultural activities

New partnerships across communities and sectors

York Region-wide framework and point of connection

Communication and cooperation among arts and other groups

Repurposed under-used sites as cultural facilities

Increase levels of public and private funding for culture

by

Why support the arts in York Region?

- Reduce social isolation

- Combat the "geography of nowhere" outlook by providing opportunities to develop pride of place

- Increased community empowerment through involvement and ownership of local community initiatives

- Improve relevancy of cultural activities by better understanding what people are doing and want to do

- New partnerships across communities and sectors

- A York Region-wide framework and point of connection that can respond to identified community cultural needs

- Greater communication and cooperation among arts and other groups

- Integrate culture into the larger community more effectively, increasing awareness of the potential of arts and cultural activity to contribute to community and economic development

- Improve visibility of a community's artists, cultural workers, and organizations

- Repurpose under-used sites as cultural facilities

- Increase levels of public and private funding for culture

Arts and culture are primary means by which we make sense of the world and are critical to supporting the long-term resiliency of York Region's residents. Trust comes through meaningful exposure to others and we believe that decentralized arts and culture activities are critical pathways to increasing trust within communities, among communities, and with centres of power and decision making. Trust and connection come not from exposure to the arts, but also through participation in the production of culture.

The human and economic costs of fragile communities are being revealed by COVID-19 and the protests against ongoing systemic racism. As of July 2020, the Parliamentary Budget Office estimates over \$150B in direct costs related to COVID alone with more likely to come as the economy recovers from the sudden shock. The health system, housing market, labour market, the long term are system, and other critical supports are facing incredible pressures. Countless businesses and industries are seeing bankruptcies and closures including such cultural stalwarts as Cirque de Soleil. Reports suggest that thousands of small businesses in Ontario are on the verge of bankruptcy. On July 3rd, 2020, research from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) was released that surveyed small and medium sized businesses and found that 16 per cent say are preparing to close permanently as a result of the economic shutdown brought about by the pandemic and quarantine.

York Region Arts Council must respond how it can to current conditions. Arts and culture are unlikely to drive economic recovery. However, the arts and culture are demonstrating their critical importance in supporting those suffering during these unprecedented times. Arts and culture also offer a way forward, as community members must increasingly rely on each other as existing systems are stretched to their breaking point. Unnecessary hospital visits, increased policing, educational failures, and other social costs stretch these systems even further. Arts and culture can relieve the stress on our institutions and build resiliency for current and future shocks.

This plan provides a structure for advocacy for arts and culture in a post-COVID York Region.

The days of the arts driving hotel stays and restaurant visits are far in the future. The costs of caring for the isolated, treating the mental health needs of youth experiencing racism, and responding to communities without hope surround us today. Arts and culture must reclaim a role as a driver of social, community, and personal transformation.

This document is not principally a reaction to the current moment. The core themes were developed prior to the spread of the

pandemic to North America and the quarantine that has resulted. The plan, however, has evolved as a result of massive cultural shifts. The core commitment remains – **to understand art and culture as essential in building individual and collective resilience to current and future shocks.**

This document is supported by extensive research into aligned initiatives launched around the world. Moreover, we have created one long and three short videos providing testimonals from individuals in York Region attesting to the importance of the arts in strengthening the fabric of community. The videos are intended to serve as media to be shared in support of the broader process of advocacy and evidence of the ideas shared here.

This document is intended to serve as the York Region Arts Council's guide for the coming years both during COVID and as we gradually emerge from under its shadow.

Advocacy Action Plan: This document outlines the steps that the York Region Arts Council might take to argue for the importance of the arts and culture to stakeholders and community members. The impacts of COVID-19 and increased awareness of racism against Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour communities are putting pressure on social and institutional structures in profound and unpredictable ways.

Arts advocacy that fails to acknowledge the critical moment we find ourselves in will ultimately fail to secure the broad support necessary to push forward real change. Arts as Resiliency honors the current environment and suggests action that addresses visible and quantifiable social costs.

Advocacy Strategy: We understand advocacy as comprising a point of view that suggests a pattern of advantage and a plan of action to realize that advantage. In describing the advocacy position, we advocate four key elements.

1. The Problem: What human problem are we trying to solve that underpins the problem the YRAC strategy is addressing?

2. Insight: What surprising or unexpected observation do we bring to the problem?

3. Capability: What unique skills or resources do we possess that equips us to deliver on this insight?

4. Plan: What are we going to do?

This document is an elaboration of these four points.

1. The Problem: Communities that are fragmented and isolated are less resilient to shocks such as COVID-19, anti-Black racism, and the effects of climate change. Without pathways to support, too many retreat from public participation and suffer alone, access expensive public services, and/or engage in anti-social behaviour that further erodes trust and overall resiliency.

2. Insight: A decentralized arts strategy increases individual and collective resiliency and develops meaningful pathways to mutual aid and care.

3. Capability: The York Region Arts Council is a York Region-wide non-profit charitable arts service organization with a mandate to deliver capacity building, creative placemaking, and community engagement in support of artists, arts organizations, and creative entrepreneurs.

Plan: The YRAC will acknowledge the unique needs of diverse communities across the region and advocate for cross-sector support to invest in pathways to resilience through decentralized activity and capacity building. Rather than centralizing activity across the region, the YRAC will advocate for a consistent framework that will support communications and arts advocacy at different scales and in different locations to reflect local needs.

Arts Advocacy Opinion: Carmen Salas / Independent Curator / www.carmensp.com

What should we expect from art in the next few years/decades? And what is art, anyway?

I had a dream last night. In my dream, our cities, communities, and the natural environment are the museums and galleries of tomorrow. In my dream, the traditional exhibition spaces and art objects (material objects) no longer exist, and artists, cultural agents and creative practitioners collaborate with citizens, communities and professionals from other sectors (scientists, farmers and politicians) to design better systems and to co-create activities and programmes that encourage creativity and bring about social change.

The main reason that led me to work in the arts and cultural sector in the first place was the transformative power I believed it had. Art is intimacy and inspiration. Not only does it transform the physical spaces it occupies but also the people it comes in contact with. I have always thought that art should not only be understood as an act of creating/producing/exhibiting material objects and/or digital experiences. It should also be the way in which individuals approach/organise/structure life, and their willingness to care for themselves and for others.

The French philosopher Foucault identified, more eloquently, this same idea in the 20th century: "What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to life. That art is something which is specialized or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life?"

These words seem particularly relevant in a world where we will have to learn to live with coronavirus over a prolonged period of time. In a world where scientists estimate the arrival of new pandemics every 5–10 years as a direct result of our way of living. In a world dominated by alpha males of the likes of Trump, Putin, Bolsonaro, Boris Johnson, López Obrador, that are putting the lives of millions at risk for the sake of capitalism. Michael Moore too, who from an influential position in the media, reiterates in his latest film Planet of Humans a damaging premise: Renewable energy doesn't work.

In a world where we are already confronting critical interconnected challenges: climate change, the refugee crisis, food scarcity, system collapse, etc. I think it is essential that we continue asking these questions: what is the role of art at a time of social transformation? Why do we make art, for whom and does it make sense to continue using the same formats and materials? What should art be focusing on and what difference can it make? How far can artists go in social transformation without renouncing their role as creators/artists? When does it stop being art? Can the art world provoke and drive social transformation, a shift in values, making us rethink our relationship to material culture? Can it reveal new definitions of what progress means? Without doubt, the current situation leads us to question/rethink/reimagine the way art institutions, art practices and artists operate.

Our Aim

Through this project, Intervene Design and the York Region Arts Council have investigated what functions the York Region values as a community and how the YRAC can shape activity and public discourse to position the arts as a driver of positive change in service to these functions.

We believe that current conditions demand that art advocacy respond to a broad set of social, environmental, and economic forces that promise to create great uncertainty for the foreseeable future in Canada and elsewhere. Public concern is mounting around the short- and long-term impacts of COVID-19 as well as issues related to anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism, climate change; security; growing restlessness with inherited institutions; and the opportunities and threats from new technologies.

The arts must respond to complex problems that we collectively face to generate the resources it needs to thrive.

The Problem

COVID-19 pandemic has had an abrupt and deleterious impact on the arts and culture sector across York Region and around the world. Closures and cancellations have been followed by ongoing uncertainty for both organizations and individuals – both employed and independent – across the sector. Arts and culture organisations are attempting to deliver on their missions and commitments to community while maintaining high levels of safety. They are struggling.

Since March 2020, most cultural institutions had been indefinitely closed or have seen their services radically curtailed with exhibitions, events, and performances cancelled or postponed. In response there has been extensive efforts to offer substitutes through digital platforms, to preserve resources to support post-COVID recovery, to document what's happening, and to set the stage for new works inspired by current events. Many individuals across the sector have temporarily or permanently lost contracts or employment with varying degrees of warning and financial assistance available. Equally, financial stimulus from governments and charities for artists, have offered some relief but seemingly inadequate to the extended recovery expected in the arts community.

Compounding this, increased awareness of police brutality and anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism as a systemic issue have led to public outrage and protest. Demands for change in the arts and culture sectors are ongoing with specific and organized pressure being applied to funders and large institutions seen as emblematic of long-term systemic racism.

How these entangled issues unfold is still an open question, but the arts sector will be profoundly changed as a result. Large events will be met with hesitation until a vaccine is safely deployed. Work that privileges Western European tastes or approaches will be harder to justify in pluralistic contexts. Tourism, restaurants, and hotels – traditional beneficiaries of arts investment – face a similarly slow road to recovery, and no one event will be sufficient to overcome fears of public gathering or risk of infection.

Traditional approaches to arts advocacy are unlikely to be effective in a post-COVID world. We should anticipate an indefinite period of at least partial social distancing, debate about the role of culture in society, and broad anxiety about human-derived global impacts. With future pandemics predicted to come in five to ten-year increments and the majority of the impacts of climate change yet to be felt, the current moment may be a precursor of what's to come rather than an interruption or isolated incident.

Arts advocacy has traditionally fallen into one of three categories:

1. Art as economic driver – arts and culture provide direct and indirect economic benefits through tourism, value-added services in design and innovation, and so on.

2. Art as representation – cultural and other communities see themselves represented in the culture being produced and feel an increased sense of belonging.

3. Art as progress – the arts improve the individual intellectual, social, and cultural conditions of participants and audiences.

All three of these advocacy positions remain relevant to varying degrees and potentially in new ways. For example, we argue for an evolution of the arts as driving economic outcomes to one of cost abatement. The human and financial costs of COVID and systemic racism are enormous. Rather than seeing the arts as a way of supporting growth, it can better be understood as a means of reducing pressures and expenses on an already strained system in much the same way that the healthcare system is part of a much larger network of family and community supports for the unwell or infirm.

The costs of COVID have yet to be fully accounted, but they are unimaginably high in terms of lost income, foregone consumption, and infrastructure to accommodate our new reality. The costs of ongoing systemic racism are also becoming better understood. The 2016 Census showed that 20.8% of people of colour in Canada are low-income compared to 12.2% of non-racialized people. Racialized women earned 58 cents, and racialized men earned 76 cents, for every dollar a white man earned in Ontario in 2015. In education, Black students were 12% of the Toronto District School Board student population but represented 48% of all expulsions. In 2016, 40% of inmates in segregation at the Toronto South Detention Centre were Black, but they are only 7.5% of the Toronto population.

We are also seeing how issues of COVID-19 and racism are interrelated. Quarantine has pushed many of us into connecting more frequently in digital contexts. Living in a networked world has many advantages. We get our news online almost as soon as it happens, we stay in touch with friends via social media, and we advance our careers through online professional networks.

However, there is a darker side to the internet that sees far-right groups exploit these unique features to spread divisive ideas, racial hate and mistrust. Scholars of racism refer to this type of racist communication online as "cyber-racism".

The World Economic Forum conducted a systematic review of ten years of cyber-racism research to learn how different types of communicators use the internet to spread their views. They found that the internet is indeed a powerful tool used to influence and reinforce divisive ideas.

Both digital and in-person racism has the main effect of undermining the social cohesion of modern multicultural societies. They create division, mistrust and intergroup conflict. The American Academy of Pediatrics has issued a policy statement outlining how racism affects the well-being of young people. The paper brings together all the global evidence available on the connection between discrimination and health outcomes of children and adolescents experiencing or witnessing racism.

The problem comes down to stress. When the mind experiences a potentially harmful situation, it tells the body to prepare by increasing its heart rate, breathing, blood pressure and releasing stress hormones.

When young people experience this response frequently, it causes inflammatory reactions in their bodies that can ultimately lead to immediate health problems and, in the long run, chronic diseases.

Researchers now believe that racial disparities have far-reaching effects as children develop, including infant mortality rates, mental health problems (depression and anxiety), and behavioural issues (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder).

Moreover, the health effects hurt more than those directly experiencing discrimination. When children observe racism, it can erode their self-confidence and mental health enough to affect developmental milestones and achievement in school. This is especially true when the discrimination is affecting the children's parents.

Canadian research is generating similar results.

A 2010 study of 277 children of colour presented at the Pediatric Academic Societies meeting in Vancouver revealed a strong link between racial discrimination and depression. Racism has detrimental consequences across all developmental stages.

However, children with supportive parents, friends, and teachers weathered the challenges of racism much better than their peers lacking such support networks. COVID tells a similar story, whereby those with greatest access to human supports weather the challenges best of isolation and precarious health.

Insight

Given the implications of COVID-19, increased recognition of systemic racism across society, and the likely consequences of climate change, we believe that arts advocacy in York Region should focus on Art as Resiliency.

Resilience is the personal and collective ability to be knocked down and to get up again. Resilience involves preparation and a rich network of mutual support. The community development literature focuses on social capital as a key determinant in communities successfully responding to crises or negative conditions. Social capital comes from shared understanding, cooperation, and reciprocity. The arts can serve to cultivate these qualities.

Many have pointed to the value of arts and culture during this period of quarantine and forced isolation. However, the impacts of COVID-19 are not experienced equally and not everyone has equal access to opportunities to address isolation.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its ripple effects are revealing stresses in the systems we depend upon for our collective well-being.

In the absence of effective formal leadership, many communities are trying to help themselves. Unfortunately, this often means that those with access to wealth, relationships, and information are first in line for critical resources. Politically favored communities in dense population centers are getting help faster.

Culture post-COVID becomes a means to ensure that communities can respond to shocks. draw on a sense of belonging and reach out to the most vulnerable. Small-scale, local investments in culture allow for blended digital and real-world support that abides by distancing requirements while reducing isolation.

Research

Decentralization in Arts + Culture: Survey of Decentralized Community Art Practices to Enhance Community Connections

Decentralization in arts and culture is the process by which the activities of creating, disseminating, and engaging artistic ideas are shifted away from a central, authoritative group. Instead, they are carried out by localized, community based artists, working in collaboration with communities in ways that are smaller, but when combined with other efforts, provide greater opportunities for engagement with the arts to a broader group of people. As such, decentralized arts and cultural work enables resiliency through increased bonding within communities, bridging among communities, and linking to decision makers and other stakeholders in the Region.

Decentralization leads to greater resilience by:

- Fostering connections within and between communities (bonding and bridging)
- Producing artistic work of greater relevance to audiences (increased belonging)
- Enhancing people's engagement with the arts and artistic practice (increased relatedness)
- Strengthening the ability of the arts to make interventions towards greater social justice (linking)

Environment Scan

Advocacy action will see York Region Arts Council offering a framework for activities across the region that focuses on building resilience. Later sections outline the specific plan of action. However, research in other locations and in the literature suggest that effective decentralized arts/cultural practice is generally defined by the following distinct, but overlapping, characteristics:

a.   Cross sectoral partnerships to bridge communities

Literature on resiliency refers to three different types of social connections: 1) bonding as connections between close knit communities; 2) bridges, which are created between different groups; and 3) linking, which happens between communities and people in positions of power .

A decentralized arts ecology, further enabled by cross sectoral partnerships (partnerships with non arts groups), can engage communities at all three levels by providing artists access to locally relevant content, space, and a community connection.

Cross sectoral partnerships particularly enable the difficult work of bringing different groups of people together, thus expanding the impact of the arts from a bonding activity to a bridging activity, where new exchanges and connections can take place.

(Smith, Karen. Persistent Encounter. What is the relationship between social capital and Creative People and Places? 2018, pg. 13)

Examples:

1. The Food Justice Residency Program: Artists work with farms and other food related groups to produce art that engages with food justice locally and brings exposure to what it means to be a worker within the food system.
2. Storyscapes: Brings together First Nations and Chinese communities to share stories of connection in Vancouver and identify shared histories
3. Close Tamms Ten Year Campaign: Began with local poets sending poems to inmates in solitary confinement, and grew into further exchanges, and eventually to a community gathering and dinner as protest, which also involved driving family members for visitations. Persistence and creativity by artists and community members eventually led to the prison's closure.

b.   Localized to enable meaningful responses:

Art activities are carried out for and with a specific community; where there is familiarity between the artist and the members of the community, and where the need for the artistic activity has been identified by the community itself. Localized art practice also allows people from different geographies to access art experiences that would otherwise be too far, or too expensive, to attend. COVID is severely curtailing willingness to attend cultural activities in distant sites, though this will ease over time.

Examples:

1. Creative People and Places: Enables 30 localized projects across Britain that are about more people taking the lead in choosing, creating and taking part in art experiences in the places where they live. Each is located in an area where people have traditionally had fewer opportunities to get involved with the arts.
2. Barsama Sama: concept of "doing it together" from Indonesia, where small artist collectives form to address the neighbourhoods they belong to.
3. Mapping Resistance: is a public art project exploring the activist history of the Young Lords in East Harlem. Artistic renderings of this history have a physical presence in the community, and narrativized through community tours by the artist.

c.   Non-traditional venues:

In order to address a local context, reach new audiences and engage specific, localized, communities, artists seek out non-traditional venues. These can include abandoned sites, streetscapes, exhibitions on transit, restaurants, malls, homes and so on.

Examples:

1. **Wein a Ramallah - Festival**: Take place in the City's public spaces and non-conventional areas leaving open room to artists to explore and imagine new spaces that fit – artistically and technically - with their exhibitions and performances.
2. **Open House**: Toronto artist Sandra Brewster responded to the lack of exhibition space given to BIPOC artists by hosting extensive exhibitions in her own home for 3 consecutive years.
3. **Front porch concerts:** Bringing together community, highlighting local musicians and driving interest to local businesses
4. **Feast on Good**: Enabling people to facilitating intimate, meaningful gatherings (founder Rei Chou was interviewed as part of this process and is open to engaging in work in York Region)

d.   Blurring roles of audience/participant/collaborator:

Artists work closely with communities to identify, design, and implement activities. In this scenario, the artists enter into a relationship with their communities at the very beginning, if not before the artistic engagement begins, rather than at the end as part of the presentation of the work. Blurring of roles supports more meaningful connections among community members that can be sustained beyond the duration of the work. Traditional presenter – audience dynamics do little to cultivate long-term relationships except among the small number of creators.

Examples:

1. Choir Choir Choir: Anyone can join and sing as they like. Choir members are at once a participant and a collaborator.
2. Neighbourfest: A block party that brings the community together to have fun, but also leverages the planning process to build relationships that facilitate efforts to increase the emergency preparedness in neighbourhoods in San Francisco.
3. Freestyle Union: Cypher style workshops through which this group has cultivated many successful hip hoppers, DJs and poets. All involved are participating, collaborating, and growing together
4. Reenactment of the Largest Slave Rebellion in American History: Artist Dread Scott engaged 400 community members for this ephemeral community performance

Summary: An environment scan (6 days research) of related projects and strategies suggest four main activities to centre in advocacy positions. First, YRAC should focus on cross-sector partnerships to bridge communities and to provide access to relevant content, space and community connection. Secondly, advocacy and investment should be highly localized and responding to clearly articulated needs by the community. This will also require early participation and connection among artists, commissioners and community members. Thirdly, advocacy should focus on non-traditional venues to improve the reach of efforts and to ensure that more than the usual suspects are engaged in activities. Traditional arts venues only reach limited cross-sections of community and often do a poor job of facilitating interaction and relationship building due to the operating and business models of presenting. Finally, advocacy should argue for entangling audiences, participants, and collaborators over the duration of the creative process. Communities become active in the creation of works and build stronger ties than through passive audience participation.

Capabilities + Context: Role of York Region Arts Council

COVID-19 has revealed the importance of digital tools to connect in moments of crisis. It has also revealed that many communities lack meaningful social bonds that allow them to collectively support one another during emergencies.

The Angus Reid Institute, in partnership with Cardus, conducted a Canada-wide study on social isolation and loneliness in 2019 and the results show that people are spending more time alone than they would like, and that people are feeling lonely even when they are surrounded by others.

Moreover, the majority of social interactions are with the people we live with. However, more Canadians than ever before are living alone. In 2019, 28% of respondents offered that they felt lonely. An Ipsos Poll conducted in April 2020, during the COVID quarantine, saw that number spike to 50%. Furthermore, feelings are more likely to be amplified if people identify as:

- a senior;
- single;
- Indigenous;
- a visible minority;
- LGBTQ2+; and/or,
- having a physical disability.

Having fewer social connections and regular interactions also tends to correlate to other aspects of overall well-being. Highly connected people are more likely to believe that their life satisfaction is high. The more isolated and lonelier we feel, the more likely we are to identify that we have no one to turn to in times of crisis.

Arts and culture can provide a framework for building resiliency among community members. Advocacy will focus on building closer connections among neighbours and communities to improve the individual and collective capacity to respond to present and future shocks. Advocacy is therefore not focused on excellence or artistic product but about the relationships that art and culture allow. These connections can be segmented as; bonding within communities, bridging across communities, and linking to decision makers and other sectors.

In the short-term, social distancing will be enforced until a vaccine has been widely distributed. In the long-term, communities must be prepared for similar challenges brought about by novel pathogens, climate change, or unforeseen events. Arts and culture become a means for all community members, particularly the most vulnerable, to forge stronger bonds, to express themselves positively, and to explore new skills and approaches to community challenges.

York Region is home to 1.2 million residents with strengths in information and communication technologies, life sciences and financial services. This can serve as a strong base for seeking support in the form of expertise, access to spaces, financial resources, and dissemination of process and outcomes. These are also sectors resilient to shocks such as COVID and with shared interests in connectivity, health, and community well-being.

Based on the 2016 Census Data and reported in Nordicity's The Creative State of York Region there are 26,565 cultural workers residing in York Region or 5% of the overall workforce and 10% of all cultural workers in Ontario. The cultural sector in York Region is split between those centered in ICT with "workers in digital media having occupations such as software engineers, interactive media developers, etc." The software publishing industry is also bundled up in this grouping and data set. The second sub-sector refers to less technologically-embedded creative occupations, principally in the arts. There are significant gaps in terms of overall needs and income between these groups. The former has better representation from diverse cultural communities and is embedded in more complex value chains which leads to more managerial roles in the overall workforce (and a clearer career progression).

The arts sub-sector of cultural workers is defined by high education, low annual earnings, and work models that favor entrepreneurship and sole proprietorship structures. Moreover, this subsector sees lower rates of participation by individuals identifying as a visible minority relative to the overall population of the region.

Based on the 2016 Census and the categories used in that process, York Region's population identifies as a visible minority 47% of the time. Participation in the arts as a subsector is at 38%, with museums and heritage at 24% and libraries at 37%. The data should be understood as describing employment in these fields rather than participation.

Communities of colour are making art, preserving heritage, and sharing culture. However, these activities often exist outside of paid roles and are less professionalized due to decades of systemic over-investment in Western European disciplines and tastes and therefore are often ignored in policy formulation and support.

Although not listed in Census employment data, non-professionalized arts and cultural activities in different communities serve important functions. Broadly they offer opportunities for expression, a means of seeing one's culture reflected in the world around us, and pathways to relationships and support. For our purposes, unpaid arts and culture work serves to strengthen community bonding and to bridge with other cultural communities through creative practices and traditions. This activity will also be a focus of advocacy and activity in addition to the more traditionally supported professionalized arts and heritage sectors.

This Advocacy Plan extends from the recommendations surfaced by Nordicity through a round-table process as part of their research on behalf of York Region Arts Council. The following recommendations from the Nordicity process were central in the arts advocacy positions outlined here. Notes in italics were added by Intervene Design.

<div align="center">Develop a regional collaboration framework for York Region's culture sector</div>

- Strengthen York Region's brand as a hub for arts and culture (specific focus on community arts incubation)
- Investigate avenues for stronger emerging artist "seed-funding" options in the region (micro-granting, community arts incubation, community storytelling incubation)
- Encourage culture-sector connectivity: animate all corners of the region with arts and culture with creative space use (focus on unusual spaces and decentralized arts practices)
- Develop regional approach to skills building, mentorship and professional development for the culture sector (focus on community-centered models)

Furthermore, Nordicity's survey respondents advised that YRAC focus on the promotion of local arts/artists (67%), access to grants/funding for artists (67%) and supporting networking and community building (59%). All three of these are core aspects of this plan. The third of these initially referred to connections within the arts community. Additionally, we argue that bridges should be built that prioritize connections with non-arts industry sectors and local communities in pursuit of broad resilience.

Nordicity identified several challenges as well. Barriers include the Region's vast boundaries and lack of public transit connectivity. These factors were central considerations in the overall advocacy design. Rather than activities that span the region, YRAC will advocate for hyper-local activities that are embedded in a coherent framework that ties the diverse components of the Region together.

Another identified challenge in the Nordicity work centers on a vicious circle, "whereby York Region residents are far more likely to visit cultural attractions in downtown Toronto than frequent attractions (in) York Region". COVID-19 and the subsequent quarantine is severely limiting the ability and desire to travel to participate in cultural activities.

There is a window of opportunity to attract York Region residents to local activities, particularly to those within walking distance as residents become exhausted by long periods in front of a screen while still hesitant to attend large-format cultural events.

Related Positions

Yokohama, Japan: *Following the Fukushima earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident, Yokohama introduced an approach to culture focused on community connection. In preparing the plan, 80% of surveyed respondents identified that personal ties within society were more significant because of the disaster. The plan advocated for arts as a means to "enrich citizen's life, cultivate and nourish children, support artists engagement with urban development and transmit Yokohama's unique culture." Specific promotion has focused on the Triennale, the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conference, Events and Exhibitions) market, more arts activities for kids, residencies in partnership with local businesses and non-arts venues, and directly engaging residents in the arts.*

Yogyakarta, Indonesia: *Bersama sama translates as togetherness and is the focus of the Yogyakarta and Bandung cultural strategy. The plan outlines the role of the arts in fostering togetherness and how it manifests into small collectives in the cultural scene. There is little state support for the arts and therefore the cultural plan draws on a history of neighbourhoods organizing themselves to take care of their community together.*

MAST (Manchester Arts Sustainability Team): *MAST is driving a global coalition to address climate change through art and culture. MAST is a network of about 30 arts and cultural organisations – from community arts centres and iconic cultural venues to an internationally renowned festival and national broadcasters - working together on climate action and engagement. For example, MAST member Wrocław, Poland focuses on building sector collaboration. "We now aim to support arts and culture in our city in coming together to act on climate change and support us in helping our citizens understand the issues we face and take action themselves." Manchester advocates for other cities to mobilise their arts and culture sectors to contribute towards local climate change action. Partners include Mantua, Italy; Gelsenkirchen, Germany; Šibenik, Croatia; and Águeda, Portugal.*

Escaping Baumol's Cost Disease and the Community Arts Incubator

Baumol's cost disease is a well-understood and well-researched phenomenon in the performing arts. The cost of presenting work rises as the cost of living increases (people need higher salaries to live), yet opportunities to improve 'productivity' in the performing arts are not available or applicable due to the nature of artistic performance. Live performances simply do not scale easily. This has been the traditional argument for public and philanthropic support for the arts.

COVID-19 will further weaken the viability of traditional performing arts organizations. The focus going forward will be on blends of digital and analog cultural experiences that are small and intimate or large-scale digital-only presentations. The former will demand higher price points and customization. The latter will be low price or free with exploitation of user data providing the revenue upside, but more often than not for the platform rather than the presenter. High-price ticketed performances with strangers will be untenable for at least the next 18 months and likely longer.

A beneficial by-product of an advocacy position focused on community resilience is the opportunity to support low-cost innovation in future business models for the arts. Models of organizing small groups of people around culture can be refined and serve as an incubator for models that suggest viability and replicability.

York Region Arts Council can centre advocacy activity around economic sustainability of emerging models of cultural production with the Community Arts Incubator as the centre. The program will explore and support emerging business models in community arts brought about by changes related to COVID-19 and unrest around ongoing systemic racism. This program would provide capacity-building support and key partnerships to accelerate models that reflect emerging trends in the production and dissemination of culture. The program will drive direct revenue through traditional arts funders, and indirect funding in support of the broader theme of decentralized arts practices.

Evaluation Framework

Evaluation can be organized around community development activities intersecting with cultural work as first outlined by Amareswar Galla. Evaluation will measure and share:

1. Health of the cultural resource base for creative expression and practice (can people participate in what they want to participate in);
2. Participation levels by community in valuing and participating in cultural expression and appreciation (are people participating and valuing that participation);
3. Availability of relevant community infrastructure for the support of cultural activities (are resources, licenses, spaces and other assets easily available for cultural production); and
4. Viability of the economic framework for cultural production and promotion (can people sustain themselves through arts and culture).

Summary of Advocacy Action

Art and culture are consistently (by municipalities, partners and others) described as means to overcome distance and encourage empathy within and among communities.

Development, resourcing, and promotion of cultural and artistic activities will focus on nurturing a sense of belonging, creating local resilience, AND eventually helping to drive tourism, diversify employment opportunities and increase the attractiveness of York Region as a place to live and work.

York Region Arts Council will advocate for arts and culture embedded in community to build collective resilience to deal with emergencies such as COVID-19 or the inevitable impacts of climate change.

Investment in small-scale cultural events will be married with digital storytelling to demonstrate the efficacy of a highly local approach and to attract additional resources from across sectors.

Positioning and research focus on support for the arts leading to stronger communities, decreased isolation, a sense of belonging, lower costs in emergency response, new economic and creative opportunities, and a welcoming place for a diversity of residents.

YORK REGION ARTS COUNCIL: ART AS RESILIENCY

SKETCH OF STRUCTURE

Advocacy will focus on support for the arts leading to stronger communities, decreased isolation, a sense of belonging, lower costs in emergency response, new economic and creative opportunities, and a welcoming place for a diversity of residents.
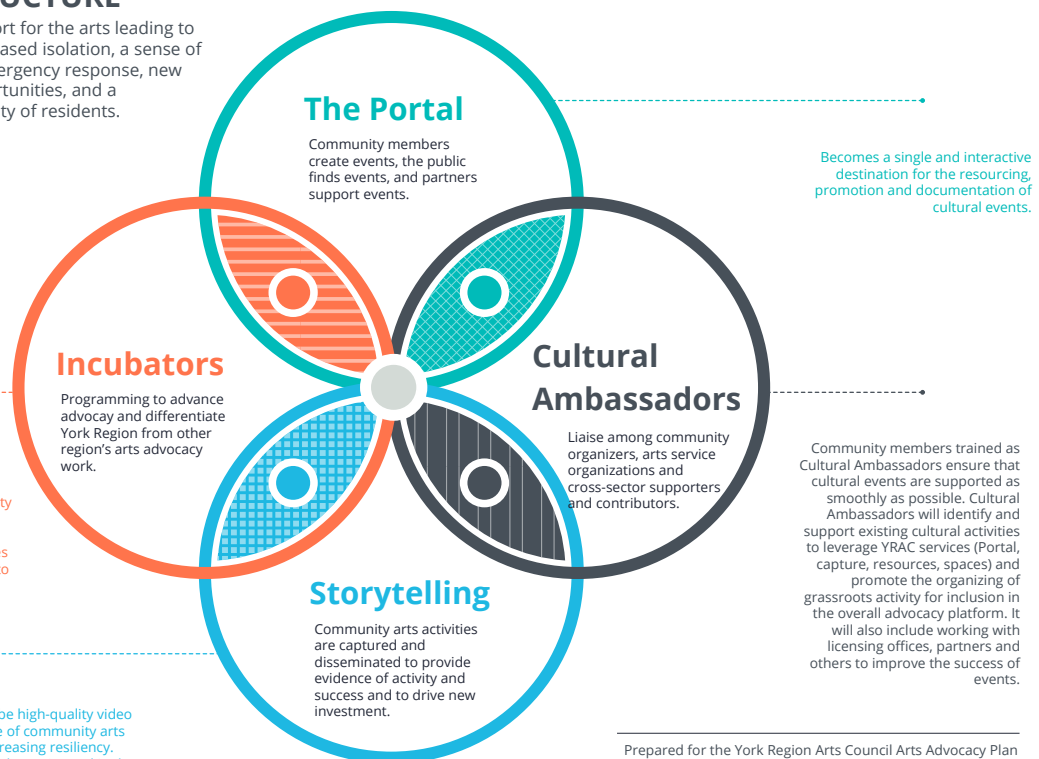
- **The Portal**
- **Incubators**
- **Storytelling**
- **Cultural Ambassadors**

The Portal
Community members create events, the public finds events, and partners support events.

Becomes a single and interactive destination for the resourcing, promotion and documentation of cultural events.

Incubators
Programming to advance advocay and differentiate York Region from other region's arts advocacy work.

Community Arts Incubator created to explore emerging models in community arts work. Capture and dissemination bolstered by Community Storytelling Incubator which provides professional development opportunities in the creative industries with a focus on those facing barriers to participation in the workforce.

A primary technique of advocacy will be high-quality video stories demonstrating the importance of community arts activities in reducing isolation and increasing resiliency. Storytelling becomes a means for the those situated in the for-profit and those in the non-profit arts and culture sectors to intersect and collaborate.

Cultural Ambassadors
Liaise among community organizers, arts service organizations and cross-sector supporters and contributors.

Community members trained as Cultural Ambassadors ensure that cultural events are supported as smoothly as possible. Cultural Ambassadors will identify and support existing cultural activities to leverage YRAC services (Portal, capture, resources, spaces) and promote the organizing of grassroots activity for inclusion in the overall advocacy platform. It will also include working with licensing offices, partners and others to improve the success of events.

Storytelling
Community arts activities are captured and disseminated to provide evidence of activity and success and to drive new investment.

Prepared for the York Region Arts Council Arts Advocacy Plan (2020)

A **resilient culture** in York Region is described as one that has the infrastructure – both physical and social – to plan for and withstand whatever challenges it might face. Physical infrastructure is easily understood. It can be seen and touched. But social infrastructure is complex, involves multiple stakeholders and is difficult to measure. **Storytelling** allows for social infrastructure to be seen. One aspect of this is social capital: the resources and other benefits that come from social relationships and networks. These are the underpinnings of this strategy and they begin at the neighbourhood level.

This advocacy position is well-aligned with emerging themes in the Canada Council for the Art's funding priorities as well as private philanthropy that may not be generally inclined to invest in arts and culture. With a focus on social infrastructure, new partners become possible with a vested interest in social resilience.

The arts become both a means of defining what a **healthy community** looks like and a way of building the necessary social capital to realize it.

The focus needs to be on the **most vulnerable** as this is where impacts of severe events like COVID-19 are most acutely felt.

Core advocacy themes would centre on:

1. cross-cultural understanding;
2. decreased isolation leading to increased self-sufficiency; and
3. togetherness - because of differences, not despite them.

Specific initial issues can include anti-Black racism, loneliness, and inter-generational connections.

Advocacy work can also be designed in ways that shift cultural concepts (e.g. learned helplessness or distrust among whole groups). However, the focus is less on events such as festivals or performances and more on patterns that are embedded in everyday life and consistently applied across the region by government and other partners.

Potential Language

"in it together" "creating home" "creating community", "artful resilience" "connecting through culture" "no one left alone" "band together" "art from the pieces"
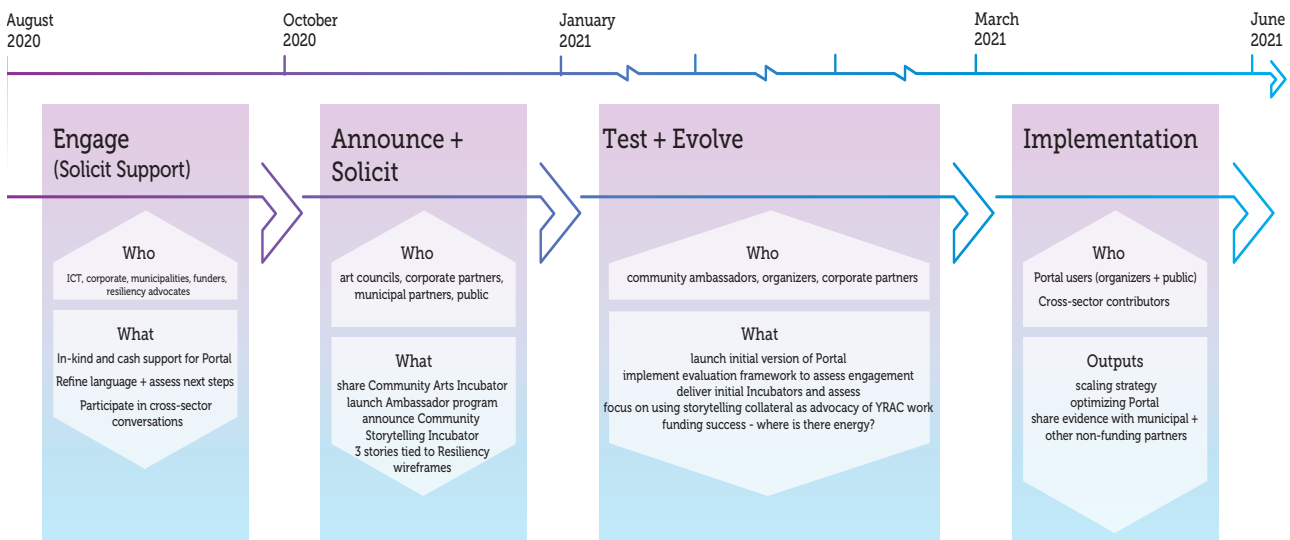
Social Capital

Author Lyda Hanifan referred to social capital as "those tangible assets [that] count for most in the daily lives of people: namely goodwill, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit". These are the themes we see as central to communicating this position:

Goodwill, Fellowship, Empathy, and Exchange.

Action Plan

York Region Arts Council has an opportunity to think strategically about how resources can help communities achieve their civic and social goals. While we offer a specific implementation path, it is emblematic of a broader strategic approach that seeks to directly and indirectly integrate community cultural resources into a wide range of localized activities. Actual implementation will necessarily evolve as conditions around anti-racism protests and the COVID-19 pandemic unfold.

August 2020 — October 2020 — January 2021 — March 2021 — June 2021

Engage (Solicit Support)

Who
ICT, corporate, municipalities, funders, resiliency advocates

What
In-kind and cash support for Portal
Refine language + assess next steps
Participate in cross-sector conversations

Announce + Solicit

Who
art councils, corporate partners, municipal partners, public

What
share Community Arts Incubator
launch Ambassador program
announce Community Storytelling Incubator
3 stories tied to Resiliency wireframes

Test + Evolve

Who
community ambassadors, organizers, corporate partners

What
launch initial version of Portal
implement evaluation framework to assess engagement
deliver initial Incubators and assess
focus on using storytelling collateral as advocacy of YRAC work
funding success - where is there energy?

Implementation

Who
Portal users (organizers + public)
Cross-sector contributors

Outputs
scaling strategy
optimizing Portal
share evidence with municipal + other non-funding partners

Understanding culture and cultural activity as drivers of human and community development, rather than merely as cultural "products" to be supported because they are good for us, unlocks possibilities for new value creation. By understanding culture as inclusive and broader than a traditionally Eurocentric and professionalized vision of culture, we can increase the assets with which we can address issues such as social isolation and community conflict.

The **goals** to be described in the communication of this Advocacy Action Plan are as follows:

- Reduce social isolation
- Combat the "geography of nowhere" outlook by providing opportunities to develop pride of place
- Increased community empowerment through involvement and ownership of local community initiatives
- Improve relevancy of cultural activities by better understanding what people are doing and want to do
- New partnerships across communities and sectors
- A York Region-wide framework and point of connection that can respond to identified community cultural needs
- Facilitate communication and cooperation among arts and other groups
- Integrate culture into the larger community more effectively, increasing awareness of the potential of arts and cultural activity to contribute to community and economic development
- Improve visibility of a community's artists, cultural workers, and organizations
- Repurpose under-used sites as cultural facilities
- Increase levels of public and private funding for culture

We imagine advocacy as comprising a series of interrelated activities. Based on the research, conducted interviews, and similar programs elsewhere, the following key activities should underpin a public-facing advocacy plan. While advocacy often focuses on politicians and other decision makers, the post-COVID environment will see aggressive and competitive lobbying from various interest groups in service to supporting recovery. A public-facing strategy will support indirect influence and resource development while still being persuasive in recruiting political support to arts and culture.

Key Action Plan Elements

1. A **Portal** (available through browsers and as an Android/iPhone app) modeled on the CIRCLE program in the UK that becomes a single and interactive destination for the resourcing, promotion and documentation of cultural events.
2. Community members trained as **Cultural Ambassadors** to ensure that cultural events are supported as smoothly as possible. Cultural Ambassadors will identify and support existing cultural activities to leverage YRAC services (Portal, capture, resources, spaces) and promote the organizing of grassroots activity for inclusion in the overall advocacy platform. It will also include working with licensing offices, partners and others to improve the success of events. A similar model was leveraged by the City of Toronto to drive climate-friendly home renovations in various communities across the city.
3. Programming: **Community Arts Incubator** created to explore emerging models in community arts work that are economically sustainable and contribute to positive community outcomes. The program focus will be on post-COVID needs and preparation and resiliency to future shocks, particularly those brought about by climate change.

4. Storytelling: Community arts activities are **captured and disseminated** to provide evidence of activity and success and to drive new investment and participation.
5. Programming: Capture and dissemination bolstered by **Community Storytelling Incubator** which provides professional development opportunities in the creative industries for York Region youth with a focus on those facing barriers to participation in the workforce.
6. YRAC staff and allies focus on directly **advocating with institutional partners and funders** across sectors to finance and support items 1 through 5, as well as arts activities promoted through the Portal with money, space, expertise, technology, and communications support.

Advocacy work drives traffic to the Portal which becomes the entry point for those creating culture, community members looking for things to do, those consuming stories generated through past cultural activities, and organizations seeking to support and resource cultural activities for a range of reasons. Advocacy activities will be prioritized on the following criteria:

- Arts and culture that builds resilience through closer community connection (bonding), cross-community exchange (bridging), and connecting with other sectors in the region (linking)
- Highly localized activity that is relevant and derived from community desires
- Focus on the transformational potential of participation in arts and culture
- Access to resources and spaces that facilitate this activity
- Capture and storytelling to share unambiguous evidence of the efficacy of the process and to advocate for the approach

ONE
The Portal

The Portal becomes the destination for all of the advocacy activities outlined here. Advocacy should be aligned to opportunities and spaces to bring communities together for bonding, bridging, or linking activities. While the scoping and design for a Portal would still need to be done, one approach could include the visualization and mapping of overall activity throughout York Region. Although there are many excellent examples, Queering the Map is a visually attractive and highly interactive version: https://www.queeringthemap.com/.
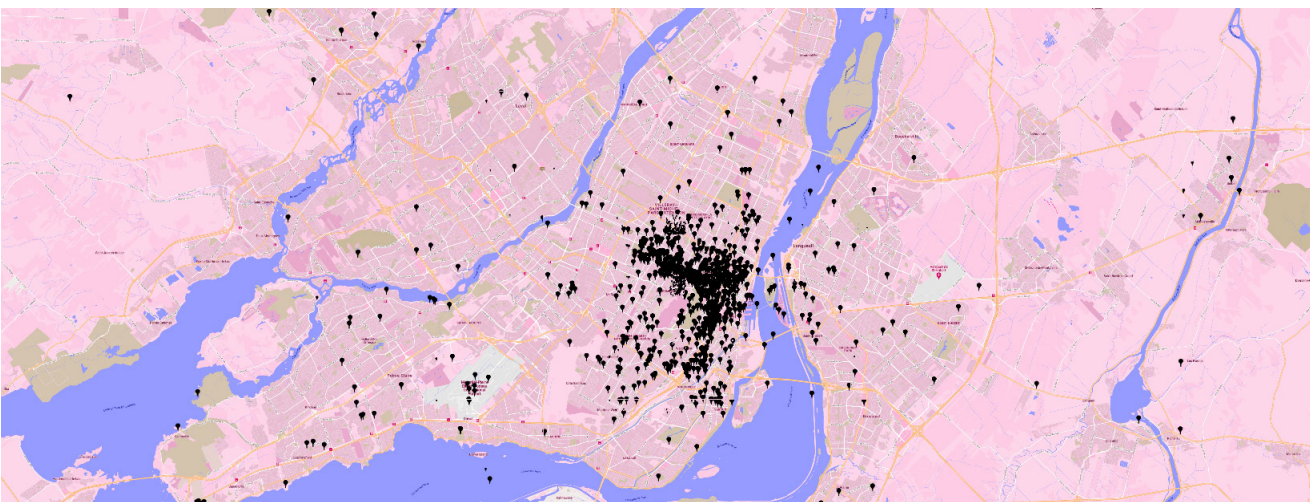
Just as the City of San Francisco heavily invested and advocated for block parties to build preparedness for large earthquakes, York Region is investing in promoting and supporting cultural activities that address social isolation, create greater belonging, and ensure that the most vulnerable have pathways to resilience and participation in arts and culture.

The Portal would be designed to serve four key audiences:

- Those looking for something to do. Events would be marked on the map and through an app, people could quickly find activities happening near them.
- Those organizing an event. The platform becomes a means of promoting an event and would be connected to the ability to secure support such as spaces, micro-grants, expertise, or communications support through the Community Storytelling Incubator.
- Those curious about culture. The platform also houses the digital capture so that high-quality stories are shared about localized cultural activities.
- Those wanting to be seen by the above three groups. Sponsors, advertisers and others can invest in the portal and its activities and be positively affiliated with cultural activities across the region.

York Region has a strong information and communication technology industry and these organizations may be willing to offer the expertise and resources necessary to host a platform such as this in return for sponsorship considerations. The Portal becomes the 'presenter' of grassroots cultural activity and sponsors become affiliated with the events as well as the stories of change shared through the Portal.

Cultural Ambassadors liaise between organizers and the Portal as well as between organizers and other stakeholders involved in the licensing and delivery of cultural events across the region (linking). Activities might involve helping organizers upload information about their events, helping them secure appropriate licenses, getting information about regulations and insurance, and offering guidance on how to run and safe event.

The Circle platform in the UK may serve as a useful model for the approach. Circle was developed to address isolation for the elderly. A simple technology platform enabled a small local team to respond on demand and connect members to one another. Circle had limited overheads: no buildings, vehicles and so on. The initial prototype was funded by Southwark Council, Sky Media and the Department for Work and Pensions provided the initial funding for the design and prototyping of Circle. The program was driven by a desire to preventatively address impacts and costs related to isolation and to foster capabilities for self-sufficiency. The program also was designed to have a
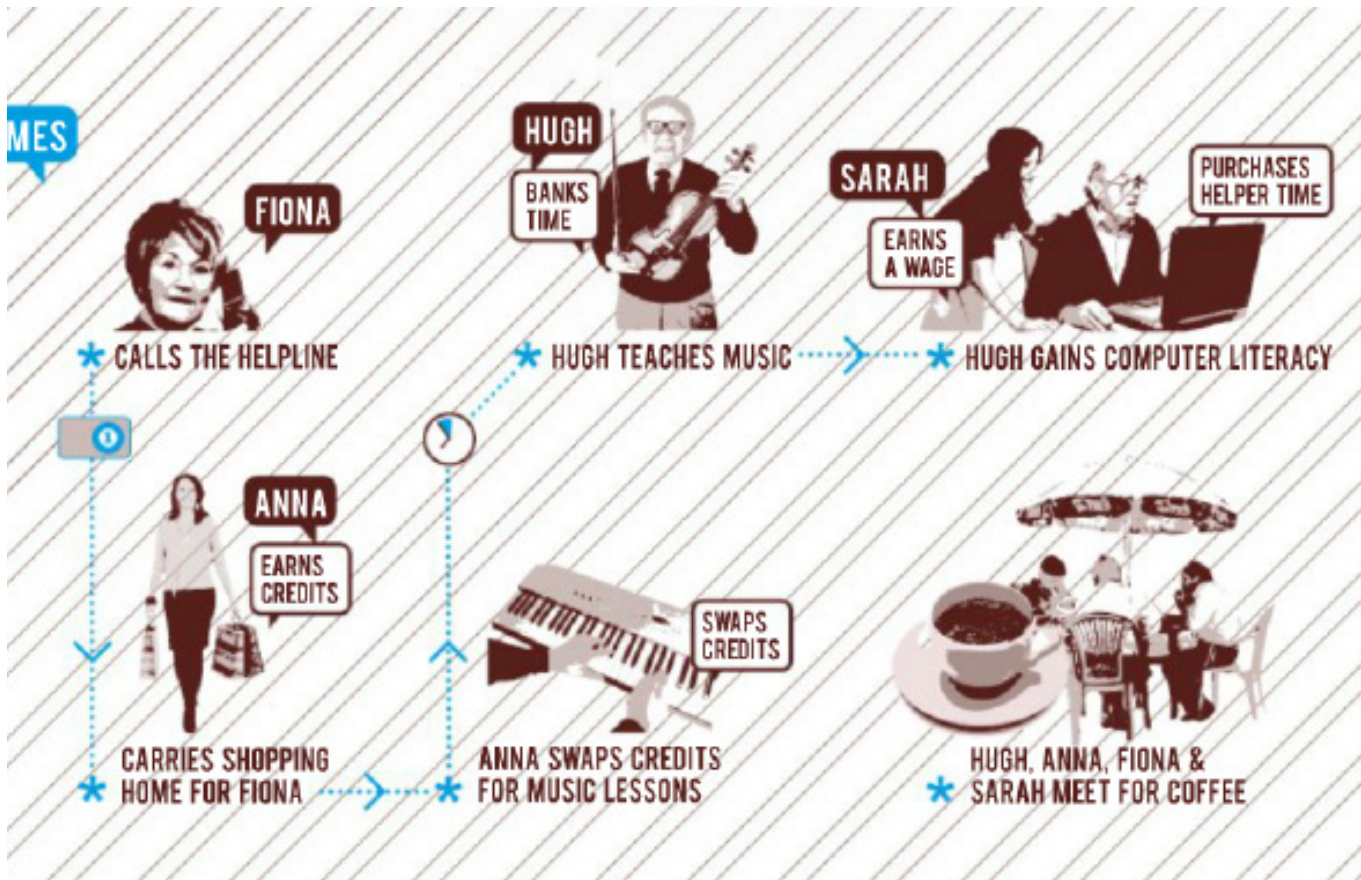
Southwark Circle - Participle - from
https://wearethecityheroes2013.wordpress.com/2013/12/22/article-1-the-southwark-circle/

wider impact on the public policy landscape by shifting how services to the elderly were understood and delivered. The initial launch in Southwark (pop. 320,000) was then expanded to three other locations. Circle was independently reviewed and demonstrated strong social and health outcomes, reducing social isolation and the unnecessary use of statutory services. Users offered strong endorsements of the qualitative value of the service in transforming their lives. Circle saved public money, helped to keep people living as independently as possible for as long as possible, reducing the need for long-term personal care and support.

The core services offered by each Circle vary, but are centered on an ever-changing social calendar and on demand practical support. However, the "key to the success of the Circle model is the relationships members have with each other. New and diverse friendship groups sustained over time offer practical and emotional support in a light touch, everyday way and are there for when the inevitable difficult times emerge".

Users were not looking for expensive, complex services. The platform facilitated simple activities such as listening to music or playing games. People wanted social connections that were genuine with like-minded people. People did not want relationships to be forced but they did want the opportunity to go out and make new friends. As a result of the Circle program, people sought out new ways of living, working and contributing.

York Region could similarly create a digital platform and applications across devices that connect users to events (bridging), organizers to resources (linking), sponsors to opportunities (linking), and the public to each other (bonding). The platform becomes both a means of advocacy and the presentation mechanism of cultural programming, which in terms does the work of advocacy.

Circle was focused on preventing harm resulting from extended isolation. Independently verified evaluation showed that over 88% of members made new friends, with an average of six new friends, plus hundreds of thousands of new social connections made. Also, the unnecessary take up of services was reduced, including a 26% drop in visits with family doctors. In total, over 20,500 instances of practical support and learning were facilitated.

TWO
Cultural Ambassadors

The focus of this action plan is on full-community engagement around issues of shared concern – advocacy is not about the arts but rather the arts' role in overall resiliency. Cultural Ambassadors serve as credible liaisons between communities and the YRAC framework. By focusing on recruiting ambassadors from cultural communities and faith-based institutions, communities become active contributors in the cultural events that are shared and events are more likely to respond to actual community needs.

Nordicity argues that "without a regional framework or enhanced coordination amongst the municipalities and municipal agencies, there can be duplication of effort and missed opportunities. Such a framework might also address some administrative barriers raised by stakeholders and which ranged from permitting issues and insurance costs, to the need for more culture sector liaisons across the Region, the "go-to" people for culture".

For example, a Cultural Ambassador may be aware of a small, local event in need of a space or a micro-grant. The Ambassador seeks permission from the event organizer(s) to include the event on the Portal and may even help with the process. A corporate partner has a suitable space and makes it available to the event. Visibility on the Portal (a map) encourages others to attend (bridging) and a storytelling strategy generates high-quality documentation of the event for others in the community to appreciate (bridging). The event is more sustainable due to the availability of space and small amounts of funding (bonding).

Cultural Ambassadors ensure that a broader cross-section of the community takes advantage of non-professionalized arts activities and that grassroots events have access to supports and storytelling services to amplify their impact.

YRAC Cultural Ambassadors become a one-stop shop to get micro-grants, licensing, insurance, ensure that all requirements are met and capture to tell your community's story.

THREE
Community Arts Incubator

Business models in the arts are undergoing profound transformations. There is a growing recognition that art and art making must increasingly extend from the needs and desires of communities as opposed to the needs of philanthropy or elite cultural institutions. Furthermore, traditional business models built around a mix of presentation, public funding and individual philanthropy are poorly suited to support sustainable cultural production post-COVID.

The Community Arts Incubator will allow for York Region and YRAC to take a leadership role in understanding the operating and business models for post-COIVD arts and supporting innovations that extend from broader advocacy activities.

In 2013 there were 47 identified arts incubators in North America. At that time, arts incubators were primarily concerned with providing artists with the skills to turn their art into a means of making a living.

Since 2015, however, there has been a proliferation in incubators concerned with the emerging needs of creative practice and the effects of technology on both creativity and commerce.

Building successful entrepreneurial models in the arts is not a Canadian problem. Many regions are recognizing the need for new approaches to creating and sharing artistic work. Platforms that lower barriers to market entry and cushion financial risk so that effective operating models can be developed are appearing around the globe.

York Region has an important role to play.

There is a strong community of support around artists and arts organizations in York Region. YRAC has an opportunity to position this expertise as globally relevant in exploring arts models and arts incubation that is community-centered, pluralistic, and sustainable.

FOUR
Storytelling Strategy

A primary technique of advocacy will be high-quality videography and other media rich stories demonstrating the importance of community arts activities in reducing isolation and increasing resiliency.

Storytelling becomes a means for the those in both the for-profit and the non-profit arts and culture sectors to intersect and collaborate. Selected events will be captured and disseminated to provide evidence of activity and success and to drive new investment and participation. Stories then anchor social media activity and direct advocacy activity. Storytelling is driven by paid producers (or successful producers willing to volunteer some time) and the Community Storytelling Incubator (see FIVE).

FIVE
Community Storytelling Incubator

The Community Storytelling Incubator would support those facing barriers to develop skills to launch a career in the media industry. POV 3rd Street in Toronto is an organization that helps marginalized youth break into the media industry through training, mentorship, job placement and professional development opportunities. The Community Storytelling Incubator would operate in a similar way, but with a focus on telling stories of diverse communities presently underrepresented in the media landscape. Training and opportunities would focus on videography, creative direction, post-production, and so on and would allow York Region creative industry professionals to offer their skills to others in the region. Events supported by the YRAC would serve as authentic learning environments embedded in community and the Portal as a portfolio of the work.

SIX
Cross-sector Collaborations

YRAC staff and allies focus on directly advocating with institutional partners and funders across sectors to finance and support items I through V, as well as arts activities promoted through the Portal with money, space, expertise, technology, and communications support.

- **Create a "who's who" list:** Working with various partners, make a list of officials, leaders, organizers, and others who are in positions of influence with regard to overall community resilience. For this project, our initial focus was on the school system, creative industries, municipalities, and cultural community leaders. This list should include elected representatives, senior bureaucrats, staffers and others with whom you might interact.
- **Solicit meaningful data:** The overall effects of COVID and ongoing protests are currently hard to measure but nothing is more persuasive to cross-sector influence than a compelling story augmented with recent evidence. Some initial research supported the creation of this plan. More will be necessary to address different audiences.
- **Build a Coalition:** There are many non-arts organizations committed to community resilience. YRAC will have a greater chance of success if it has a broad base of support. Build a list of other organizations in the region pursuing similar goals and volunteer time to take part in collective impact work.
- **Understand the Process:** Funding, corporate support, in-kind donations from ICT firms, and philanthropy are all available resources for this strategy. All of these groups have a prescribed process by which decisions are made. professional lobbyists are paid to know the details of this process, you should set out to learn at least the basics, including deadlines, committees and consultations.
- **Leverage the Board:** Your board likely has personal relationships with influential people in other sectors. Discuss with your Board the possibility of establishing an advocacy committee to focus on influence and advocacy as a standing item.

Connection to Broader Strategy

According to the Nordicity's The Creative State of York Region "York Region's Culture Sector is not currently functioning as a cohesive sector from an administrative, marketing/communications or operations perspective. There is opportunity for leadership to identify shared goals and advance collective initiatives that would benefit the sector as a whole"

Additionally, other directions were recommended that included the need to:

• Build awareness of York Region's cultural assets and amenities, encourage audience growth and development and strengthen the profile of York Region more broadly
• Extend/amplify limited marketing budgets through collaborations (i.e., lend scale to smaller organizations in discussions with media partners in print, online and radio)
• Support York Region's reputation as the incubator for artists
• Mitigate vastness with programming and communications that demonstrate exciting and achievable York Region culture itineraries (single day, afternoon, weekend-long, etc.)

We believe that this advocacy plan directly addresses these recommendations while responding to the profound changes the world has experienced since the initial research was conducted.

What does success look like ? *(12 months)*

Any successful advocacy campaign must be driven by a clear vision of what a positive and realistic outcome would be.

 "What is it YRAC wants to do?"

We believe that YRAC must make a compelling argument for the importance of arts and culture during a period of extreme uncertainty, economic precarity, and political volatility. Art is can even be seen as extraneous during good times. COVID and the period that follows will only increase pressures on the sector to define its worth.

Arguments leveraged over the past 20 years in advocating for the arts are unlikely to be effective. Consider the following from the Portland Arts Council in their call for input in April of 2020.

> "The idea that artists and creatives will "be there" when this is "over" is misguided at best.

> I don't know when this will be "over". I do know that without thoughtful, equitable, and generous support, they won't and can't.

> The pandemic is not artists' problem to solve, but artists have been tasked with imaging our collective future.

> COVID-19 is our collective challenge to ourselves and to each other to take care of each other. What kind of city would Portland be without film, music, dance, theater, writing, performance? Can you even imagine it? As arguments rage over money and values and funding priorities, pitting for-profit vs. non-profit, art community vs. creative industry, organizations vs. individuals, the lifeblood of Portland is dangerously close to disappearing.

Creatives without resources will be forced to leave. Venues that cannot open will shutter forever, and industries without support will go elsewhere. We need money. Yes! Even more than that, we, as artists and creators and supporters, need to be valued, not only for the jobs we create and the economic impact we have, but also for how we exist. We inspire, delight, invite, and challenge you in every neighborhood, every single day, and in every language.

We are a wonderful, wild, diverse, rich, imperfect ecosystem. Let's set aside our differences and talk about how to make it to the other side of COVID-19."

So, what does success look like?

In 2021, the York Region Arts Council will:

- Announce capacity-building programs for community-engaged artists (Community Arts Incubator)
- Bring in $250,000 in new resources (cash and in-kind) to support localized artistic projects, newly announced incubators and the Cultural Ambassadors program
- Bring in $250,000 in new resources (cash and in-kind) to develop a Portal to serve as the anchor of advocacy efforts
- Recruit and train videographic expertise to document and disseminate at least 6 stories of resilience as part of supported projects (as part of initial Community Storytelling Incubator)
- Share the events, acts of generosity, and resources through a spatialized representation (a map) so that progress is clear and reach unambiguous – pilot app of the Portal

Who is your advocacy target?

Who can help the York Region Arts Council reach your goals? The answer to this question may involve several target audiences – elected officials and staff in the region's municipalities, the media who could build support for it and other constituent groups who could help in the overall advocacy campaign. There is a rich network of organizations committed to resiliency tied to education, libraries, policing and social work.

As you are dealing with different target audiences, YRAC will need flexible messaging that will be persuasive for each one. More importantly, however, is the need for high-quality storytelling collateral to demonstrate existing successes and build emotional connection.

Messengers will also vary depending on the audiences. Government will require both "experts" to elaborate on the impacts of the approach and the voices of community members in collateral and programming. All stakeholders are more likely to be influenced by "real people" who speak from their personal experiences of the connection between cultural production and resiliency.

The videos accompanying this report hope to show potential directions for collateral.

The YRAC will need to work with stakeholders to clarify the following steps, ideally drawing on arguments and opportunities outlined in this report:

1. Confirm the description and scope of the issue: **Communities that are fragmented and isolated are less resilient to shocks such as COVID-19, anti-Black racism, and the effects of climate change. Without pathways to support, too many retreat from public participation and suffer alone, access expensive public services, and/or engage in anti-social behaviour that further erodes trust and overall resiliency.**

2. Confirm the goals for the year ahead:

*   1st iteration of the online portal including map visualization funded ($250,000) and presented
*   Announce Community Arts Incubator
*   Announce Community Storytelling Incubator
*   Pilot media production as collaterals for resource requests
* $250,000 in in-kind (ICT) and cash commitments toward events

3. Confirm target audience and develop personas:

*   ICT, finance and healthcare sectors
*   Existing networks committed to resiliency (policing, libraries, education, social work)
*   Arts council and funders
*   Communities facing barriers to participation (identify and recruit Community Ambassadors)
*   Cultural consumers (service design approach to develop portal tool)

4. Refine position statement and support documents.

5. Expand implementation plan for 2022 and 2023 based on progress around pandemic and anti-racism actions locally, nationally and globally.

6. Engage networks to identify other affinity organizations and systems.

7. Track and evaluate.

    Specific Tactics: Once the overall direction is confirmed, YRAC can strategically allocate human and other resource toward methods needed to deliver your messages, and in what order. Considerations for advocacy tactics include:

*   Meeting with government officials
*   Social media and email campaigns
*   Editorial board meetings with the media
*   Media conferences
*   Inviting government officials to events "Brought to you by the YRAC"
*   Monitoring committee and legislative work and attend committee meetings
*   Hold breakfasts or luncheons on particular issues and invite elected officials to speak.

Public Education Tactics

There is great power in hosting information sessions, panel discussions or workshops.

Though time consuming and not as effective in regards to reaching large numbers of people, the intimacy provided by such events—and the learning being tied to an experience—contributes a great deal to people actually retaining a significant amount of the information provided.

The most important conversations that happen in an advocacy campaign are those that happen when you are not in the room. Public education sessions improve the likelihood that those attending will speak positively and persuasively about the role of the arts described here.

Public Education Campaigns can be augmented using print, television, radio and the Internet.

Conclusion

As Randall Terada at the Ontario Nonprofit Network reminds us,

"Art creates the pathways that bring people together. It nurtures connection and builds community. And looking to the future, Ontario's artists and cultural sector are re-engaging communities for an equitable, collective recovery from COVID-19. Workers, organizations, and funders alike are all stepping up."

York Region can take a leadership role in showing what this looks like and incubating the expertise necessary to make it happen sustainably.

Arts and culture gives us more than cultural events or "products". Understanding culture and cultural activity as resources for human and community development allows for an advocacy strategy that reduces isolation, increases belonging, and builds resilience to address current and future shocks. By centering advocacy in the real needs of communities and by building connections to other communities and to stakeholders that can facilitate success, the York Region Arts Council can demonstrate its central role in post-COVID recovery and the broad importance of the arts in imagining a better world.

We argue for a local definition of culture that focuses on more than just Eurocentric, arts-based activities and heritage. We believe in artistic values and cultural meanings that are negotiated between cultural practitioners and the audience or community, rather than defined or prescribed by arts producers, institutions and authorities alone. We see advocacy focused on building networks, relationships and partnerships that drive resilience and support the most vulnerable and isolated.