

May 13, 2016

Response to the Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Sport's Draft Culture Strategy

We are writing in response to the draft Culture Strategy to provide the PASO-OPSA Coalition's insights and feedback.

Introduction

PASO-OPSA is a coalition of 26 provincial arts service organizations – l'organisation Provinciale de Services aux Arts de l'Ontario - (PASO-OPSA) - see list below of PASO-OPSA organizations - that strives to strengthen the environment for the artists and art institutions that create, produce, and disseminate the arts in Ontario and for public access to the arts. PASO-OPSA has operated on the principle of voluntary contributions of time and travel from Coalition member organizations since 2007. Collective memberships in PASO-OPSA are made up of individual artists as well as the performance and exhibition organizations that create and support artistic expression.

Directly and indirectly, PASO-OPSA works with the four sectors MTCS supports:

- The Arts: which includes agencies like the Ontario Arts Council and the Ontario Trillium Foundation and non-government organizations (NGOs)
- Cultural Industries: which includes the Ontario Media Development Corporation and the Ontario Media Fund
- Public Libraries: administered under the Public Libraries Act and
- Cultural Heritage: administered under the Ontario Heritage Act, includes agencies like Ontario Heritage Foundation, and NGOs like the Ontario Museums Association

PASO-OPSA priorities are to:

1. Strengthen the province's cultural policy framework through a consultative process in order to better address the challenges of artistic creation and processes of production, dissemination and distribution.
2. Increase investment by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport in key agencies such as the Ontario Arts Council and the Ontario Trillium Foundation.
3. Promote youth employment in the Province through a robust community-driven training/internship strategy.
4. Invest in adequate and affordable facilities, including digital infrastructure, for artists and arts organizations.

PASO-OPSA asserts that its members are an integral part of building a dynamic business climate; promoting cultural attractions; and most importantly supporting community partnerships and engagement.

PASO-OPSA's Response to the [Draft Culture Strategy](#):

1. Do the [Vision for culture in Ontario](#) and the [Principles to guide government support for culture](#) reflect what is important to you?

Overarching Goals: Strengthen culture in communities, fuel the creative economy, promote cultural engagement & inclusion

The Principles to guide government support for culture as outlined in the draft Culture Strategy only partially reflect what is important to the sector and its members. While we note that the Ministry has included many of the recommendations made earlier by PASO-OPSA in its Vision, it appears that the focus is heavily concentrated on cultural industries (film, television and music industries) and community involvement **and not on the development of an arts Strategy centering on professional artists**. Artists cannot be expected to fuel the economy without adequate support for their practice.

Together with visual arts, museums, writing, and publishing, the live performance sector is also omitted and more importantly not recognized as a core "pillar" of the Ontario cultural industries sector. An essential industry within this province's cultural economy, the live performance sector contributes to the social fabric and quality of life for all citizens with 73% of Ontarians attending events each year and spending approximately \$600 million within the industry.

Also, in response to the Ontario Trillium Foundation's recent funding cuts, PASO-OPSA recommends greater emphasis on the importance of increasing the availability of capital grant programs to the Arts sector. Capital grants are pertinent to the infrastructure needs and development of arts service organizations, and therefore should be recognized within a comprehensive Culture Strategy.

2. Do you think that the [three overarching goals](#) will help to grow and strengthen the culture sector in Ontario?

The Draft Culture Strategy references live music production and performance; interactive digital media; and film and television. It makes no mention of many of the artistic disciplines that form the backbone of the provincial arts landscape. The Canada Council for the Arts and Ontario Arts Council have outlined distinct as well as cross-disciplinary categories for dance, theatre, visual arts, and writing & publishing, none of which are mentioned in this document. Putting undue emphasis on specific cultural industries runs the risk of eclipsing the very real needs felt by the full breadth of this sector.

Without strategic support for professional artists, the overarching goals cannot be adequately met. Ontario's professional artists need support to sustain their livelihoods and nurture their creative work within our province. Without artists there is no creative

economy. Artists provide the insight, innovation, beauty and critical ideas that feeds the industry side of the creative economy but far too often they are not rewarded or recognized for this contribution. While it is fundamental that every Ontarian has an opportunity for creative expression, it is our professional artists who toil under often difficult conditions to make a living while bringing their creative visions to the world, from which all Ontarians benefit in tangible and intangible ways. We urge the province to put Ontario's artists front-and-centre within the Culture Strategy, following the framework established in the Status of Ontario's Artists Act. This must include training for artists in order to undergo a smooth transition into today's increasingly digital environment.

In addition, the intrinsic value of the arts has not been addressed through embedded Youth education within the curriculum - critical to providing students with an understanding of both careers and learning to engage in arts. Arts education has been proven to promote a positive impact in overall learning, as well as lead to more economically successful and socially conscious individuals. The provincial government must consider significantly increasing the number of arts specialists in every elementary classroom instead of reducing or eliminating them.

The principles outlined in the document also reflect an ideological bias in which the health of provincial culture is endorsed, yet no mention is made of an overarching public commitment to support this vision. Artists and arts-service organizations are at the heart of cultural health, yet many work within disciplines that operate outside those employed—albeit precariously—within the 'creative economy'. The aspirational objective of a rich and inclusive cultural landscape rests on a firm commitment to provide stable funding sources for this vision to be realized. Without this, the commitments outlined in this document lack the backing to effect meaningful change.

3. Do you have any feedback on the [proposed initiatives](#) in the document?

In closing, we would like to recommend that the Ministry align with the federal government, provincial funders and municipal culture plans. Using this strategy, the Province can encourage municipalities to develop MCP to include attributes that better reflect the breadth of diversity of their community and Ontario's population.

Submitted by the 26 members of the PASO-OPSA Coalition below, as well as supported by ArtsBuild Ontario.

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